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THE POWER OF GOLD.

VOL. II.

THE POWER OF GOLD

A NOVEL

BY

GEORGE LAMBERT

For 'tis a question left us yet to prove
Whether Love lead Fortune, or else Fortune Love.
Hamlet.

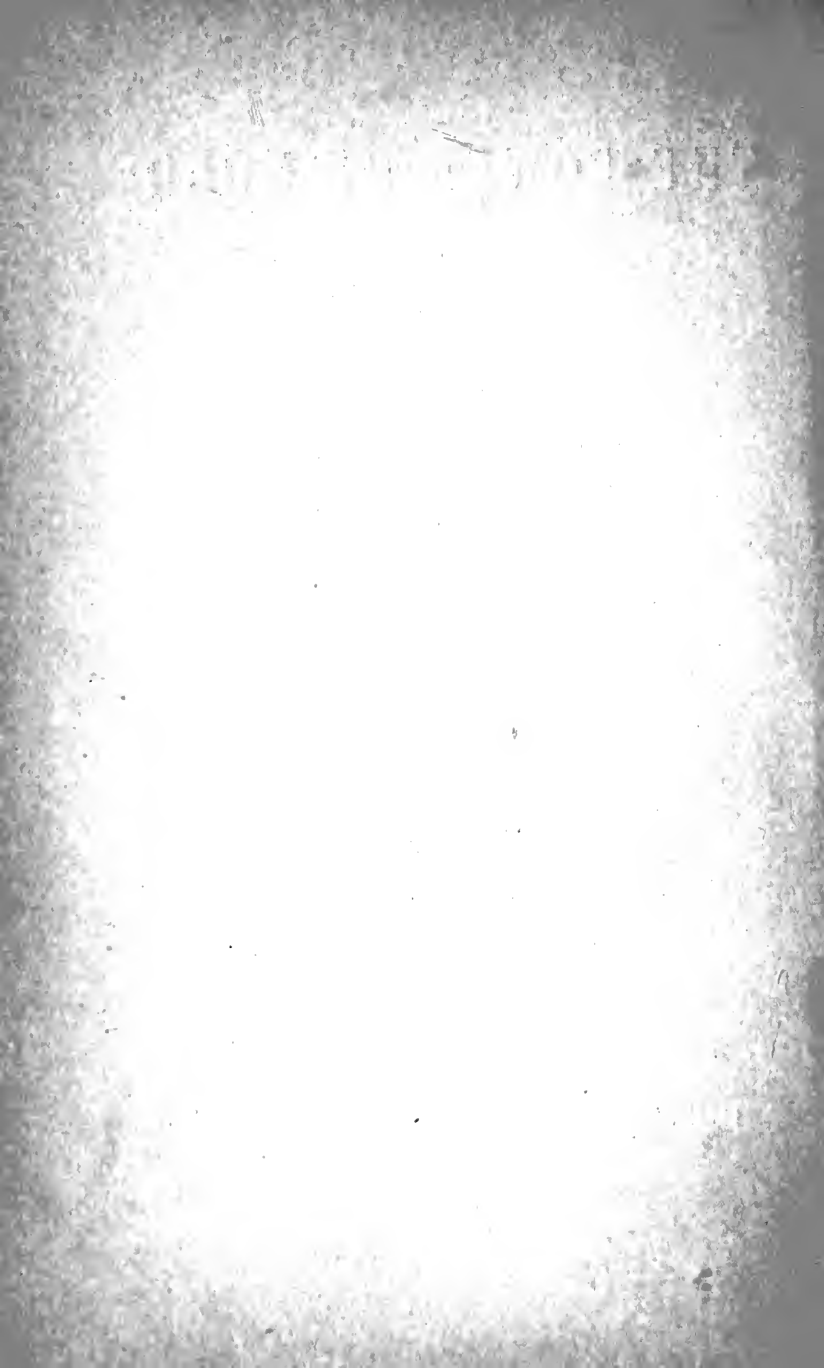
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1886.

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THE POWER OF GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

STORMY WEATHER AT COOMBRIDGE.

IN the budget of letters which Lady Limborne's maid carried to the bedside with her ladyship's matutinal tea, there was, indeed, as her son had expected, the Coombridge bomb-shell; if Mr. Armer's delicate and polite effusion can be called by such a name; and very surprised would that gentleman have been if he could have seen into the secret chambers of Lady Limborne's heart, and examined the feelings with which its periods were perused.

Against envy, hatred, malice, and all

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B

uncharitableness her ladyship was wont to put up her petition every Sunday morning (weather permitting) together with the other 'miserable sinners,' but of every one of these noxious feelings was she the prey (excepting always the first) as she read, in sentence after sentence, of her son's 'folly' (?) of the attachment of the young people (a topic upon which Mr. Armer had enlarged with what was, to Lady Limborne, an excruciating prolixity), of the pleasure of the writer at the prospect of the alliance (at which point Lady Limborne indulged in a grim smile), and of his (Mr. Armer's) hope that she (Lady Limborne) would be as pleased as he was, and suffer him to pay an early visit for the necessary discussion of the business side of the 'auspicious affair.' The blood of the Hautfords—on which sanguinary subject, by the way, she was particularly prone to descant—boiled in their descendants' veins as she read this harmless, necessary letter, and

she did not vouchsafe much consideration as to the terms of her answer thereto.

If it took the squire the consumption of much time, paper, and ink, and some relief to his feelings in the shape of what in the kitchen was called 'master's langwidge,' to set forth his ideas on the subject in hand, a very few moments sufficed for Lady Limborne to give, in terse if not choice terms, *her* view of the matter.

'Her son, Lord Limborne,' she wrote, 'was of age, as Mr. Armer doubtless knew, and was, therefore, at liberty to marry whom he chose; she, Lady Limborne, was not, however, bound to accept his choice; she could see nothing but misery in such an unsuitable alliance, and she desired most emphatically to state that she would on no consideration give her consent (if, indeed, it were required) to such a marriage.'

Hints as to Mr. Armer's pride, Lady Limborne had heard from the lips of her son, and, as she stamped and addressed the

letter, she was not without hopes that it would put an abrupt end to the whole entanglement. Resentment, and perhaps desertion, she would have to endure on her son's part, and though it would make her heart ache, as, in spite of her pride, her heart *had* ached ever since this affair had come between them, yet she was his mother, there were only they two, and, in time, he would forget his mad engagement and all would be well between them again. Lady Limborne hated the Armers the more, as she thought on the sufferings she had already endured, and was still to endure, for their sakes, from the estrangement of her son. As to her present action she determined to say nothing of it; she hated the whole subject, and there would be time enough to speak when the storm should burst.

And a storm, indeed, there was at Coombridge when the squire received his answer. The worst of it was that he did not

in the least expect such a terrible knock-down blow to his hopes. He had, as we have seen, been looking on with a pleased interest, and with natural paternal pride, at the beginnings and gradual progress of the courtship of Lord Limborne. He had become accustomed to the idea of such a marriage, and Lord Limborne's explanation had put the father-in-law-to-be in a comfortable attitude of certainty about it all. Judge, then, of the shock to a man of the squire's temper, and judge, too, of the consequent explosion. As sentence after sentence of Lady Limborne's letter presented itself to the squire's understanding, he became more and more inflamed with rage; the cold and insolent tone hurt him sorely, and the virtual refusal of Nellie, *his* Nellie, of whom he was so proud, stung him to madness, and he flung the letter upon the breakfast-table with a look of the most intense anger, and an expression certainly not fit for ears polite.

‘Read that! Nellie!’ he exclaimed, ‘the abominable, impertinent woman. What! “She is not bound to accept”—“On no consideration give her consent.” Great heavens! “Such a marriage.” What does the woman mean? Does she think I want to force my daughter down her throat? *my* daughter! Good heavens! the woman’s *mad* to write me such a letter! Ring the bell, Jack. Tell Tucker to put a saddle on one of the horses at once! and come you here with me, Nellie, my dear, and I’ll write her ladyship such a letter as shall open her eyes for once in her life. Good heavens! that I should have lived to be insulted like this!’ and the poor squire fell back in his chair, panting and struggling for his breath in such a manner that Nellie and Jack ran quickly round to their father, who, indeed, was purple in the face, and looked very much as if a fit of some kind or another would result from the violence of his emo-

tions. However, he soon came round, and, waving aside his anxious children, he said to Nellie,

‘My dear, don’t be frightened; it is enough to drive a man mad! That letter is from Lady Limborne, the abominable . . .’ and the squire, with a very visible effort, checked the stream of his vituperation, and went on more calmly. ‘Read the letter, Nellie, read the letter, and you will see what a charming mother-in-law you have escaped from; for, by heavens! that man shall never darken my doors again; and if you have any respect or love for your father, Nellie, you will break off this engagement at once—*at once!*’ and the squire sat nervously drumming with his fingers on the breakfast-table, as Nellie, pale and frightened, read the curt and cold epistle which had provoked such a tremendous storm. As she was reading her brother, Jack, was looking over her shoulder, and, when together they reached

the last insolent sentence, Jack was almost as angry as his father, and poor Nellie was dumbfounded at what was a far worse fiasco than any of her most gloomy presentiments had foreshadowed.

‘Well, Nellie! well! What do you think of that for a polite and civil letter, eh! eh! my dear!’ said her father, impatiently, and beginning to boil over again, ‘a nice, pleasant, amiable family you were going to marry into. For impertinence, conceit, and the most infernal pride commend me to her ladyship; and how *dare* Lord Limborne expose me to such insolence, the puppy, the young puppy, how *dare* he do it? Didn’t I receive him with kindness, didn’t I say I was delighted . . . oh, heavens! it makes me *mad* to think what a blind fool I have been!’

‘Oh! father dear,’ said Nellie, speaking for the first time, and interrupting her father in his unpleasant reminiscences. ‘It was not James’ fault, indeed, indeed it

was not; he always told me that Lady Limborne, that she that she would not be pleased at first. She wanted him to marry Lady Emily Beldon, I mean but I thought’

‘Yes?’ said her father, looking at her sternly. ‘Yes? you thought? my daughter thought? Are you a child of mine—of John Armer’s? and would you truckle and crawl to this—this woman?’ and Mr. Armer, who was quite as proud as Lady Limborne herself, was dumb at the idea of *his* daughter seeking to enter anyone’s family as a favour.

‘Father dear!’ said Nellie, as he paused. ‘Father dear, I did love him so, and I hoped she would not go against us, and I did not did not think it would be like this . . . ! Oh! Jack! Jack!’ she cried, turning to her brother for comfort in her trouble, and thus reversing the usual order of things, for it was generally *she* who was the helper,

and the extravagant and easy-going Jack who was the helped.

Jack lost no time in going round to his sister's side.

'Poor old lady,' he said, as he put his arm round her neck, and let her head rest on his shoulder. 'Poor old lady, don't you cry, my dear; never mind, Nellie, it will come all right. Confound the old harridan! what business has she to kick up such an infernal shindy——' and so on, and so on, mingling soothing words of comfort with short bursts of invective, in a manner which would have been amusing if Nellie's grief had not been so painfully real.

Now the squire was a very tender-hearted man, and the sight of Nellie's grief was more than he could bear; in a very few minutes he, too, was beside his daughter doing his best to soothe her, and to stop the painful bursts of sobbing. Nellie was not a very emotional young woman, not one of those irritating members of her sex

who seem to possess inexhaustible reservoirs of tears, and can turn on the tap, with a surprising and unpleasant ease, on the most trivial of occasions ; neither was she given to the still more exasperating habit of ' hysterics,' that ready and most effective weapon, whereby the most recalcitrant of husbands is, after a very short struggle, reduced to the condition of a ' brute !' and to consequent abject submission, unless, in a fortunate moment, he discovers the extraordinary efficacy of cold water, exhibited *externally*, in these painful and deplorable attacks. One becomes used to too frequent douches of tears, and, after many repetitions, even the most powerful attack of hysterics ceases to have any effect but that of irritation ; but the sudden ' breaking down ' of the ordinary self-possessed is sad indeed. So the squire and his son felt it, until Nellie's sobs came at longer intervals, and were less heart-breaking, and at last ceased altogether,

and were only remembered in the quick sighs which now and again escaped from her. Every sob, and every tear, and every sigh was another reason for increasing Mr. Armer's rage and resentment against Lady Limborne and all belonging to her, and his daughter's grief hurt him more even than the soreness of his wounded pride.

'Dear Jack and dear father,' said Nellie at last, raising her head from Jack's shoulder, and rising from the chair she had been sitting on. 'How good and kind you are to me; how silly of me to give way like this.'

'It is all that abominable woman's fault,' said her father, 'and Lord Limborne shall'

'Oh, father, I cannot bear you to speak of him like that,' said Nellie, interrupting her father, who, by the look on his face, was evidently going to make some not too complimentary remarks about her lover. 'Do not,' she went on, 'let us say anything

more about it just at present. It is all so dreadful and so sudden, I must think about it all.'

And poor Nellie, with still quivering lips, and eyes full of tears, went off to face her misery by herself in the solitude of her room.

'Well,' said the squire, turning to his son as the door closed upon Nellie, 'a very pretty kettle of fish your friend Limborne has got us into, very pretty indeed!'

'Yes,' said the unfortunate Jack, who had a most unhappy knack of 'letting the cat out of the bag.' 'Yes, and the worst of it is, it is all over the place by now.'

'What!' exclaimed his father. 'All over the place? all over the place? Why! what on earth do you mean, Jack? it was only the day before yesterday that that young puppy came here with his cock-and-a-bull story. All over the place! What do you mean, sir?'

'Why, do you know,' answered Jack,

‘we went yesterday to say good-bye to the Dentons——’

‘Confound the Dentons!’ exploded his father; ‘what on earth have the Dentons to do with me and my concerns?’

‘N-n-nothing,’ stuttered Jack, feeling that he had ‘put his foot in it again,’ and seeing no way out of it but ‘a clean breast;’ ‘nothing; only they seemed to know all about it; and they . . . well, you know, they congratulated Nellie upon her engagement;’ and poor Jack trembled as he saw the effect his news had upon his father.

‘Her engagement! Nellie’s engagement!’ exclaimed the squire. ‘Oh, this is *too* much, this is shameful! it’s . . . it’s . . .’ and the squire lapsed into silence, and stopped in his hurried pacing up and down the room, glaring at his son without seeing him, as the full meaning of Jack’s announcement broke in upon him. ‘I wish,’ he said at last, ‘I had never come into this

accursed country, we are disgraced for ever; don't you see, my poor boy, the meaning of it all? Those gabbling idiots at Wreford will go all over the county with their wretched news, your poor sister will pose as the girl who has "caught"—*I know the way they talk*—"caught" Lord Limborne. Pah! it's disgusting! the girl Lady Limborne won't receive as her daughter! And I . . . they will say I "encouraged him," "angled for him" . . . and the poor squire groaned in the spirit at the shameful figure he and his would be made to cut. 'Jack, my son,' he said at last, 'you know when I say a thing I mean it, eh?'

'Yes, father,' said Jack, who, indeed, was only too well acquainted with the paternal obstinacy, a quality he was singularly deficient in himself.

'Well,' his father went on, 'listen to me. You have been friends with Lord Limborne; I don't know what you feel

about this atrocious affair he has led us into, but one thing I must insist upon, and that is, that from this day you never speak to that man again. There's the letter, read it over again, and if, after such an insult to your sister, to me, her father, and to you, her brother, you can hold any intercourse with that man, you are no son of mine. I shall say the same thing to Nellie, and from to-day I will never have the name of Limborne spoken in my presence.' And with that the squire pushed over the obnoxious letter to his son.

Jack obediently read the letter through, and without a word handed it back to his father, and the squire retired to his study to chew the cud of bitter reflection, and to make up his mind as to what he should do under this new aspect of affairs.

If Mr. Armer was passing through a period of tribulation as he revolved in his mind the dire insult he had received, and sought to salve his wounds with the com-

position of a biting though short and pithy rejoinder, much more anguish of mind was his daughter undergoing in her 'bower,' and that, too, without the small alleviation above alluded to in her father's case, for no rejoinder was possible for her, and added to the bitterness of her position was the anguish she endured in the loss of her lover; for she freely confessed to herself the fact that all that must be at an end between her and Lord Limborne. The scene of yesterday at Wreford came before her with a most unpleasant distinctness, and the gushing congratulations of the Dentons rang in her ears with a painful persistence. The burst of grief into which she had been betrayed had relieved her, and given her the calmness necessary for looking the matter in the face, and deciding upon her future conduct. This, however, was no easy task, and never did Nellie miss the kind offices and loving sympathy of a mother so much as now. If she had

had a sister to confide in, or even a dear friend, she could the more easily have borne it, but she could think of no one but Mrs. Bolland, and the circumstances were of too delicate a nature for Nellie to confide in *her*.

A feeling of loneliness and desolation added to her misery, and very unhappy was our poor heroine as she struggled with her grief, and tried, in vain, to find some gleams of light in the dark future. Until now, when she was to lose it, she had scarcely realised how large a part Lord Limborne's love had in her life; to give him up seemed now almost an end of everything—and yet give him up she must, and that at once. To force herself upon Lady Limborne as a daughter-in-law was impossible; even if her own pride would allow her to take such a step, she knew that it would mean a breaking with her kind and indulgent father; and how could she go through all the shame and scandal of a surreptitious

marriage? And then again the absurdity and the shame of her present position came upon her with an overwhelming force. How *could* those horrible Dentons have found it all out so quickly? To pose before the world one day as the bride-elect of the much-sought-after master of Limborne Castle, and the very next day to meet with this terrible rebuff at his mother's hands!

The whole affair she knew only too well would form a most piquant dish of scandal for the neighbourhood; to endure the nods and looks, the whispered remarks, and perhaps even the condolences of her acquaintance was more than Nellie could bear, and she determined to ask her father to leave Coombridge on the very next day. It was, fortunately, only a few days before their final move to Hampstead—all the arrangements were made, the P.P.C. cards left on friends, and everything in train for their departure.

And next came the far more important

subject of meditation: what was she to say to James? That he would ride over in the course of the day was certain, perhaps even now he was on his way. Had Lady Limborne told him of her answer to the squire? Would he insist upon seeing her or her father?—and Nellie shuddered as she thought of the too-probable consequences of an interview between her father, smarting under Lady Limborne's insolent letter, and Lady Limborne's son, the cause of all the trouble; this *must* be prevented at all costs. And *she*, could she see James? Ardently as she longed to pour all her troubles into her lover's ears, she *dared* not see him; she was not sure of herself yet, she could not tell into what promises she might be beguiled, or into what outbreaks of emotion she might be betrayed. That he would give her up without a struggle was, she knew, impossible; that he would try again and again to see her, that he would write her appealing letters was

certain, and what to do she knew not. At last, after much painful agitation, she determined to write to her lover such a letter as should force him to see the hopelessness of the matter, and spare her the agony of refusing again and again the love she so earnestly longed after. In the meantime Lord Limborne's visit must be faced and provided for, and Nellie washed away the traces of her grief, and went down to her father's room.

'Come in,' said Mr. Armer as she knocked at his door, which knocking was a law of the Medes and Persians that could not be broken. 'Oh! it is you, Nellie. I think I have managed to show Lady Limborne that she need fear no trouble from *us*. Pah! it's sickening! I cannot help it, my dear, but I must and shall blame Lord Limborne for placing you and me in such a degrading position. I hope, Nellie, you are of my mind. I hope you see there must be an end of all this at once, and for

ever? You cannot go on with this this engagement against his mother's wish, and against my wish?'

'No, father,' returned Nellie, 'I see that you are right; it must be so. But you must help me, father dear. I want to go away from it all now; I cannot bear it here;' and Nellie nearly broke down again.

'Now, my dear little Nellie, my own brave, little girl, do not give way again, darling; your old father feels for his daughter. I will do all I can to help you; we can get away from here at once, and some day you will forget it all, and all will be right again.'

'Can we go to-morrow?' asked Nellie, anxiously.

'Yes, I have made up my mind about it. I shall drive your brother over to Bardon to see the agent, and you had better go over to the Bollands; for, I suppose, that . . . I mean Lord Limborne will come over to-day, and I won't see him, neither

do I suppose *you* will. And now, Nellie, I say to you what I have just said to your brother: I will never mention the name of those people from this day, and I beg you never to speak of them again.' And without waiting for a reply the squire hastily kissed his daughter and went out to seek Jack and start off for Bardon.

And so it happened that, when the happy lover rode up to Coombridge to pay his lover-like devoirs to his mistress, he was informed by Mr. Hudson that 'the squire, and the young master, and Miss Nellie was hout, and he didn't know when they would be hin, and master 'ad left this note in case his lordship called.'

Lord Limborne waited till he was well out of sight of the house before he suffered his horse to walk slowly down the drive, while he, with fear and trembling, opened Mr. Armer's letter and read that, 'since Mr. Armer had last seen Lord Limborne, Mr. Armer had received a letter from Lady

Limborne (to which letter a reply was enclosed); and, in view of the contents of Lady Limborne's letter, Mr. Armer must request that *all* communications between the two families may cease. Miss Armer would shortly write to Lord Limborne to the same effect.'

Lord Limborne had all along had a lingering hope that his mother would give way when things were brought to a point, and his feelings can be more readily imagined than described at this abrupt ending to his bright hopes. *One* feeling, however, made itself distinct and clear enough, and that was one of intense disgust at his mother's insensate pride, and of bitter anger at the thought of the ruin this pride of hers had wrought to his 'castles in Spain.' Neither could he see any way out of the tangle; though he thought anxiously over the matter, and reviewed it carefully in all its aspects, as he slowly rode along the well-known lanes, he could

discover no means by which the jagged breach his mother's letter had caused could be healed. At any rate he would move heaven and earth to keep Nellie to her engagement, and in the meanwhile he would leave Limborne Castle to the lady thereof, for he felt it would be long before time healed the wound his mother's hand had given him.

CHAPTER II.

TWO GOSSIPS.

Now that immaculate virgin Miss Charlotte Ingle dwelt in a charming cottage, thatched, and covered with creeping plants, in the romantic village of Bulverton; nor did she dwell alone, for she had one sister, a little older than herself, and a confirmed invalid; and not a few people were there who would have braved the fair Charlotte's wrath, which was wont to be remarkably outspoken, by the way, and would have ceased to know that interesting, though obtrusive person, if it had not been for the redeeming point in her character, her devotion to this crabbed and (it must be

added in extenuation) suffering sister. Unable to move out of the house, or, indeed, from her bed, or her invalid couch, Miss Mary took the keenest interest in the affairs of her neighbours, and nothing delighted her so much as to form an audience of one while Charlotte Ingle (returned from a day's visit, or a round of calls) undid her budget of news, and displayed her goods with significant nods, and points both of interjection and interrogation, to her eagerly attentive sister.

Great then was Mary Ingle's joy when the sound of wheels, the loud greeting of the black retriever who protected these two 'low, lorn' females, and the scarcely less loud voice of her sister announced the return of the wanderer and the commencement of a refection of gossip sure to be more or less piquant and satisfying.

It was Charlotte's usual habit on these occasions to rush into her sister's room, briefly to give the headings of her chapters,

standing and untying her head-gear the while, and then to retire to her chamber to 'make herself comfortable,' and afterwards over a revivifying cup of tea to fill in the padding, with her sister as both audience and chorus. But this time the news was of too exciting a nature to keep, and Charlotte, scarcely stopping to kiss her sister, and entirely neglecting her usual sympathetic inquiries, plumped down into her own particular arm-chair, and opened fire at once.

'Oh! my dear Mary,' she said, '*such* news! Never was so astonished in my life! Thought it was Theresa Denton?'

'Whatever are you talking about, Charlotte?' was Mary Ingle's not unnatural inquiry.

'Talking about,' rejoined her sister; 'a fine talking about there will be, for certain,' (for the Ingles were 'of Devonshire extraction,' and Charlotte occasionally lapsed into the vernacular when, as now, under the

stress of excitement) ; ‘ if you believe me, if Lord Limborne has not proposed to that little girl of Squire Armer’s, as they call him !’ and she paused to mark the effect of her tidings.

‘ Well,’ said her sister slowly, lingering over the succulent morsel with keen relish. ‘ Well ! you *do* astonish me, Charlotte ; of all the girls that have been mentioned, I never heard her name ; the *last*, you know, was Theresa Denton, your new friend, and a most *suitable* match, for if *he* has birth and title, *she* has money and plenty of it. However did you find it out, my dear ?’

‘ You’ll never guess, Mary,’ answered her sister, ‘ for I heard it from the Dentons themselves.’

‘ From the Dentons ?’ said Mary ; ‘ why, you have been staying with the Portons, haven’t you ?’

‘ Yes ! yes ! of course, I have, and they . . .’ eagerly went on her sister, anxious to tell her story.

‘Oh! but didn’t you say that nothing would induce Lady Porton to know the Dentons?’ interrupted Mary.

‘Yes, I know, and that is the best joke of all,’ Charlotte went on. ‘Lady Porton *did* say so; you know, I introduced Mrs. Denton to her, and she was quite offended—*too* absurd, isn’t it? when *every* one knows them. Well, I persuaded Lady Porton to call on them, on the understanding that they were to be on calling terms, and not to expect anything but the “big crushes,” and that sort of thing.’

‘My dear Charlotte,’ said her sister, ‘you have told me all that before; *do* go on with the story.’

‘I *am* going on, my dear,’ said Charlotte. ‘Well,’ she resumed, ‘you may guess my astonishment when the gorgeous Wreford barouche came sweeping round the drive at Porton House; you should have seen Lady Porton’s face! “This is *too* much, Charlotte,” she said, in her solemn way. “I thought

you made these people understand the terms they were to be upon . . .” but, before I had time to answer, the door opened and in marched Mrs. Denton, and Theresa, and Emily as bold as brass. Lady Porton was as stiff as a poker, but she soon lost her stiffness when Mrs. Denton told her the news. I always *did* think she had her eye on Lord Limborne for that long daughter of hers. It appears that the Dentons had just seen Helen Armer, and, as they had heard the news, they congratulated her, and Theresa told me they got it all out of her brother ; how it had been going on for ever so long, and how Lord Limborne had spoken to Mr. Armer. Lady Porton became quite friendly for *her* ; she rang for tea, and the Dentons stayed quite half-an-hour. They have got a footing in *that* house, at any rate.’

‘Well, I must say,’ remarked Mary, ‘that that Mrs. Denton is a clever woman.’

‘Clever!’ ejaculated Charlotte, ‘I should

think so ; most women would have been quite dumbfounded, for I know how keen she was about Lord Limborne and Theresa ; but not she ! she makes capital out of it, and to tell you the truth, Mary, I should not be at all astonished if she gets him for a son-in-law after all.'

'Why, how can she?' asked Mary Ingle, 'how can she, if he is engaged to Miss Armer?'

'“There's many a slip,” my dear,' said her sister, with wise wagging of the head. 'I have not done yet, the best of the story is to come. What do you think I did, directly the Dentons were gone?'

'I am sure I don't know, Charlotte; what did you do?' asked Mary.

'Why, you know it was Lady Porton's “day,” so she could not go out, and I got Jack and the trap, and drove right over to Limborne Castle.'

'Well, I never!' said her sister, surprised into a somewhat vulgar remark.

‘Yes,’ Charlotte went on, ‘I drove over to the Castle. “Lady Limborne at home?” said I, to that old fossil of a butler. “Yes, ma’am,” said he; and I followed him into the drawing-room, where Lady Limborne was sitting all alone, doing some work, and looking as proud as Punch.’

‘I never *did* like that woman,’ interpolated Mary.

‘Well, she’ll have trouble enough now, or I’m very much mistaken,’ said Charlotte. ‘She got up,’ she went on, ‘when she saw me, and, to tell you the truth, she did not seem as pleased as she might have been to see me. “Oh, Lady Limborne!” said I, as soon as the fossil had shut the door behind him, “I have called to congratulate you on your son’s engagement.” You should have seen her face, Mary; *I* never saw anything like it, I might have offered her a cup of poison, or done *anything* dreadful. “Engagement?” she said, “may I ask to what engagement you allude? I am aware

that my son's name has been bandied about by gossips;" and she spoke so nastily, and looked at me as if *I* were a gossip.'

'The impertinent woman!' said her sister. 'And what did you answer?'

'Oh! I answered her quickly enough,' said Charlotte, 'of that you may be quite sure. I am good-natured, I know, but I *cannot* stand impudence, even from Lady Limborne. "I should have thought," said I, "that Lord Limborne's mother would have heard of his engagement to Miss Armer." She turned a dead white, Mary, and I thought she would have fainted; but not she! she is much too proud for anything of that sort. Well, she looked at me for a full moment in a funny sort of way. "And where did you hear *that* report, may I ask?" said she. "I have just this minute heard it at Lady Porton's," I answered. "I am sorry," she said, "to find that this foolish entanglement of my son's has leaked out, though *how* it can

have become known is a mystery to me.” “Oh!” I said, “the Dentons heard of it, and were congratulating Miss Armer only yesterday.” Why on earth it was so, I cannot tell you, Mary, but this seemed to make her positively mad; really, I was quite frightened at her looks. “Congratulating?” she said, “how *dare* she receive congratulations! my son may marry her, he is of age, I cannot help that, but my daughter she shall *not* be; I will never receive her;” and you won’t believe me, Mary, but it’s really true, she quite screamed, and absolutely stamped her foot.’

‘What did you do, Charlotte?’ asked her sister.

‘Oh, I got away as soon as I could, you may be sure of that,’ returned Charlotte. ‘I said I regretted that I had . . . well! I don’t quite know what I *did* say, but she never answered me, just shook hands when I said good-bye, and glad enough was I to

get into the trap and drive off, as you may well imagine.'

'Whatever will happen?' asked Mary, when her sister had finished her narration.

'I am sure *I* can't tell,' said Charlotte; 'of course he is a "lord," and these sort of people think a lot of that. They *do* say that Mr. Armer is very rich, though, of course, not so rich as the Dentons, and Lady Limborne may come round, or they may marry without her high mightiness's permission; and I am sure I hope they *will*, for a more conceited, puffed-up, arrogant . . .'

'My *dear* Charlotte' interrupted Mary, 'how you *do* go on.'

'And no wonder, my dear,' rejoined her sister, 'for what I have put up with from that woman no tongue can tell.' And, indeed, the fair Charlotte, who, though thick-skinned, was not impervious, *had* received some snubbings of a very severe order from her haughty neighbour; and

the memory of these snubbings was unpleasant food for the mind. 'There is *one* blessing, at any rate,' she went on. 'If Lady Limborne does not have some unpleasant quarters-of-an-hour to-night, I am very much mistaken ; for, as I was driving down the avenue, who should I meet but Lord Limborne, and he looked as black at *me* as if I was his bitterest enemy. I am sure he didn't know who I was in the least. But I must go and "clean myself," as the folks say ; and ring your bell, Mary dear, for I'm as hungry as a hunter, and shall be really glad of my tea.' And with that Miss Charlotte Ingle retired, if her emphatic and noisy mode of departure can be described under so quiet a word.

Miss Ingle was, however, mistaken in her soothing visions of battles-royal between Lord Limborne and his mother. Bitterly angry and painfully disappointed as he was at Lady Limborne's last move, his grief was too fresh upon him for him

to think of anything else. Cruel as he felt the fates to be to himself, he had the greater sorrow in thinking of Nellie's feelings in the wretched position she was placed in. His Nellie! His dear little Nellie! of whom he was so proud! Proud! yes, and Nellie was proud, too; and, as he remembered certain words of hers, he felt all the force of this 'check-mate' of his mother's, all the consequences come in upon his mind in an overwhelming flood, and as he rode slowly up the avenue to his home, moodily thinking over his miseries the while, he cursed the pride that thus raised up a bar between him and his life's happiness. No! he would not see or speak to his mother; he would wait to see what Nellie, poor Nellie! had to say; he would try, oh! how hardly would he try, to bring her back to him—and if—if he failed (as his heart told him he *would* fail), he would leave this place, and go—he cared not whither. No wonder then that he scarcely

recognised even the voluminous figure and the too well-known pony-trap and tiny groom which appertained to Miss Ingle.

Lord Limborne had not long to wait for Nellie's longed-for and yet feared epistle. The rector and his spouse were away from home, attending at one of those mournful and dreary entertainments yclept garden-parties, at which the economical country gentleman can return the civilities of his neighbours in a commodious and all-embracing manner, and at the trifling cost of a very light refection; in which refection the mildness and wateriness of the tea is only equalled by the flatness and nastiness of what is euphemistically called 'Cup.' To one of these examples of how sadly we British can take our 'pleasure,' was Parson Bolland dragged, unwillingly, and with muttered execrations, by his good-natured wife; and so it fell out that Nellie, who was quite intimate enough with her pastor and Mrs. Bolland to take any liberties she

chose, elected to tide over the time of her lover's visit in the pleasant rectory drawing-room. A long afternoon, with a pleasant companion in the shape of some dear friend, or perhaps better still, some interesting book, is a blessing too seldom enjoyed in these times of bustle and hurry; but a long afternoon with no friend to confide in, with an ache at the heart that would make the most enthralling novel ever written dryer and more uninteresting than the baldest sermons that ever clerical vanity placed before an indignant public; a long afternoon with miserable and hopeless thoughts for the only companions! alas! poor Nellie! no wonder that the letter which was the outcome of such circumstances as these was a piteous and heart-breaking performance.

If it is always painful to say farewell (though occasions will doubtless occur to readers when 'saying farewell'—to some black sheep or another, or to 'the old love' loved no longer, for example—is not un-

accompanied with a sigh of unmistakeable relief); if it is painful to have to say farewell, it is doubly painful when that farewell involves not only the giving a 'God be with you' to a loved friend, nay, to a lover, but also the parting with the most cherished of hopes, with the brightest dreams of present and future happiness.

It was the first letter that Nellie had ever written to her lover, and although no doubt it ought to have been a somewhat formal epistle, beginning with 'Dear Lord Limborne,' and ending with 'Yours truly, Helen Armer,' yet Nellie could not, and did not, deny herself the melancholy satisfaction of pouring out the whole flood of her grief to 'Dearest James;' she was too honest to pretend that the miserable blow Fate had dealt her was anything less than grievous and almost past bearing, and as she wrote, and the happy picture of 'what might have been' came before her in all its glowing colours, as the mere fact of

writing down her love and her disappointment brought the bitterness of her disappointment before her, the tears welled up in her eyes, and, falling, blurred the words she wrote.

She could tell her lover of the depth of her affection, and she could tell him, too, how confident she was of a full and ample return upon his part ; all this was perhaps natural, and, as Nellie read over what she had said, she would not alter one word, for every word was true. But it was in the end of her first love-letter that the bitter sting was to come, for she must make it plain to Lord Limborne that all was indeed at an end, and this was a hard task ; hard to give up this the greatest joy and delight her life had ever given her, hard even to realise the fact that she would never speak to him again, never hear his voice, his pleasant whispers of love, never share with him the delight of meeting, and the 'sweet sorrow' of parting to meet again. But it

was harder still to make him understand that the cruellest thing he could do would be to speak or write to her, who loved him so.

‘It would lead to no good,’ she wrote; ‘if he had seen and heard her father, he would know that it was, indeed, hopeless; neither would she, Nellie, dearly as James knew she loved him, come to him, unless she came with a full assurance of a welcome, which Lady Limborne’s letter had made an utter impossibility.’ And then she told him, how that ‘they were leaving Coombridge perhaps for ever on the morrow, and that from this time would begin a new life; for her, at least, a blank and miserable one enough.’

By the time Nellie had finished this lugubrious epistle, the advent of the Bollandes from their mild entertainment (?) might be looked for; and, as an interview with the shrewd parson and his amiable spouse was the very last thing Nellie

desired, she walked into the village, and, having posted her letter, returned home to find her father and Jack in some anxiety about the homely, but necessary, fact of dinner. For, as has been frequently observed, whatever happens, one must dine. A miserable meal was this, the Armers' last dinner at their Devonshire house. Some remarks had been made to the squire, some congratulations on his daughter's engagement a friend had offered at Bardon, and Mr. Armer (who had curtly denied the engagement, to his friend's considerable astonishment) was sore and angry at the position in which he found himself, and would scarcely speak a word, while Nellie had her own wretched thoughts, and Jack (who, though he felt for his sister, was yet sceptical about the power of love to cause any *lasting* misery) had uncomfortable thoughts of his own about such things as the too imminent office-stool, and the farewell he was giving

to all the congenial delights of a country life.

Jack, indeed, was the only one of the party who heaved a sigh of regret as the squire, his son, and Nellie drove away from their home next morning; a sentiment of relief at leaving a place where they knew they would form a delightful subject of gossip for many days to come, possessed the other two. The nine-days' wonder of the town becomes lengthened out in an extraordinary way in the country, where the absence of more important topics, and an empty vacuum, which *must* be filled, in the brain, causes such a piece of gossip as this affair of Nellie's and Lord Limborne's to be seized upon with avidity, and retained and mumbled over with persistence, and until the very last *flavour* of sustenance has been extracted from the bone.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW UNDER-SECRETARY.

THERE is oftentimes a savour of bitterness even in the most unqualified of successes ; success almost invariably involves the discomfiture or failure of 'some one else,' though, alas for human nature ! it is but seldom that this 'some one else' has anything to do with the bitterness referred to, but rather, on the contrary, gives an added flavour of a *sweet* nature to the success. *Some* bitterness, however, there is almost certain to be, some disappointment at the prize so hardly struggled for, and which does not, after all, come exactly up to what fancy painted it, or shall we say 'him,' or

‘her’? a sentiment, too, of weariness when it is found that ambition or greed will not let us rest, for that the height we have attained to only opens up to the view other heights which seem also desirable. What then with the smallness of the result, the absence of the satisfaction looked for, the expansion of the view on attainment, may we not repeat that there is a savour of disappointment which accompanies success, almost as invariably as the cries of the wounded and the tears of the widow and orphan accompany each great victory? All these elegant paragraphs are to introduce the fact that Lady Limborne did not derive the satisfaction she looked for in the discomfiture of what she was pleased to call the Armer entanglement. To be a widow, and to have an only child,* and for that child to be so bitterly incensed as that he cannot bear to speak, or even to look upon his mother, this is verily not exactly a happy state of things. But this was, in

very deed, the case with Lady Limborne. It was no wonder that Miss Charlotte Ingle received but scant courtesy from Lord Limborne as she was driving away from, and as he was riding to, Limborne Castle, for the lord of the venerable and sooth to say somewhat mouldering pile was exercised in his mind as to how he should conduct himself towards the fount and origin of all his present trouble, his mother, to wit. It is sometimes extremely difficult to keep that fourth commandment anent the 'honouring of father and mother,' and the word 'honour' must often go through glozings and amplifications, the 'spirit' must take the place of the 'letter' in a very signal way sometimes, before the behest can be obeyed.

Few things* are more painful than the 'finding out' some one we have been accustomed to love and to look up to; we can still continue to *love*, though that is sometimes difficult enough, but how can a

man 'look up to,' or 'honour,' the 'awful dads' some men and women possess, or the mean, or dishonest, or disreputable parent? How can we love (as we are doubtless bound to love) a parent who factiously opposes our very heart's desire? 'Tis true, the opposition comes not seldom from the conviction that it is 'for our good,' but, alas! we lose sight of the motive in the deed, and we fail to see the love in the background. So it was with Lord Limborne: he only saw his mother's hand ruthlessly snatching from his very lips the cup of happiness he longed to drain; he forgot all her long years of self-denying care, all her long service of love, her pride and delight in her only child; he forgot the debts he owed to the past in the injury of the present. After all his pleadings, to act in direct opposition to his prayers! He felt in its full force the insult to Nellie contained in this letter of Lady Limborne, and, disappointed in his

dearest hopes, miserable and angry at the silly pride, the cause of it all, he dared not see his mother lest he should forget himself, and say words he should remember afterwards with pain and grief. That night he must, perforce, remain at Limborne Castle, for on the morrow he should receive Nellie's letter; and, even then, how could he leave her without seeing her again, or speaking to her?

In order to avoid the awkwardness of a *tête-à-tête* dinner with Lady Limborne, and feeling, moreover, that keen desire to be 'doing something' which assails some folk when under the stress of strong emotions, Lord Limborne drove into Exeter and dined at the club, leaving a message for his mother, saying he would not be home until late that night.

This very plainly informed her ladyship that her letter to Squire Armer had had its desired effect, for never before had her son left her in this way, and without see-

ing her himself, and making his adieux ; and, although she felt a certain relief that she had (as she termed it) discomfited the machinations of the Armers, yet she felt anything but safe in the matter ; a little ‘standing off,’ a slight exhibition of pride, no doubt the Armers would think it necessary to exhibit, but she had no doubt that ‘such people’ would not stand aloof for long, but would shortly pocket their pride and secure the matrimonial prize she fondly imagined her son to be. Moreover, the attitude Lord Limborne was taking, and the way he was resenting her interference, caused her the keenest of anguish. He was the only tie that bound her to life ; without his affection and esteem she felt existence would be almost unendurable, and she looked forward with a great longing to the time when all these clouds should have rolled away and all should be bright again. *One* cause for apprehension, however, was removed

the next morning, when she received Mr. Armer's letter; and its curt sentences, coupled with the hints as to the writer's pride which her son had let fall, left no room for any doubt upon the matter. The affair was at an end, she need trouble herself no more about 'those roturiers.' The only anxiety she now felt was as to how she should approach her son, and make him see that it was only out of sincere affection for him, and 'for his good,' that she had taken this course, and bring him back again to his old attitude of love and of respect for his proud and yet fond mother. But this was not so easy a task as imagination painted it, for when she appeared in the breakfast-room there was no plate laid for Lord Limborne.

She was too proud to let her servants see her ignorance as to the meaning of this; she did not even know whether her son had returned last night, and she waited impatiently for some hint from the

servants or for some message from Lord Limborne which should explain his absence. And, whilst she was forcing herself to make some appearance of breaking her fast, a message came, a few lines in pencil brought in by the groom, and written by her son as he was driven to Exeter station on his way to London; nothing more than the bare statement that he was on his way to London, and could not say when he should return. A mournful day did Lady Limborne spend, the first, indeed, of many mournful days, for it was a long and a weary time before Limborne Castle saw its master again. If she had known that he would have taken it so seriously to heart, she was forced to own to herself, in the course of those dreary months of solitude, she would have acted in a widely different manner, and gradually she was brought almost to wish that she had let matters take their course, for, to her frequent loving letters her son, returned nothing but the

short replies he felt that duty required from him.

The same post that brought Mr. Armer's answer to Lady Limborne, brought Nellie's letter to her son. As he read the miserable and tear-blotted lines, and felt to the full the value of the great love his mother had stolen from him, as he pictured to himself his darling Nellie, her tears blurring the words, as she wrote her heart-broken farewell, he was goaded almost to madness at his mother's insensate pride. He could not stay under the same roof with her, he would at once follow Nellie to London; in spite of her entreaties, he would write to her, see her; *something* could and must be done to break through this hedge of pride, and at any rate he would be near her.

And so it came about that, long before the Limborne breakfast hour, Lord Limborne was on his way to catch an early train to London.

Other thoughts, besides the painful

thoughts of the loss of his Nellie, occupied Lord Limborne's mind in the four hours journey to the metropolis ; there were difficulties of a practical nature to be faced in the course he was taking ; live with his mother he could not, and would not, but how to maintain even the most modest of bachelor establishments was a question fought with insurmountable difficulties as to ways and means ; he could have a room hard by, and live at his club, as was his wont when alone in London, but the room must be paid for, and likewise the repasts the club provided, and *how* to pay for this room and these repasts was a problem not easily to be solved. The all-devouring agricultural depression, the cause of so much want, misery, and ruin, had found out Lord Limborne's county at last, and had attacked his already insufficient patrimony ; his few tenants could not, he knew only too well, pay their rents without substantial reductions, and these reduc-

tions, already demanded and conceded, cut out a 'montrous cantle' from his small income. Indeed, without the dribbling in of occasional guineas, the fruit of his literary labours, he must long ago have gone to the wall, and how could he write, how could he follow up events with the keen interest and close observance of the political reviewer when his mind was full of the anguish of the bitterest of disappointments?

All his difficulties he had divulged to Squire Armer in his memorable interview with that gentleman, on the occasion of his demanding the hand of his daughter, and the squire had very easily put aside all these troubles by promising to the young couple such a sum as should relieve them from money worries. The thought of money had not entered into his mind in regard to Nellie; that the squire was well off he knew, and some small provision doubtless he would make for his daughter's

future, but that he was ready and willing to give her such a handsome marriage gift was an astonishment and delight to Lord Limborne, for in it he saw an end to his financial difficulties, and an early realisation of all his hopes, instead of the period of 'waiting for fortune' he had looked for.

As he was ruminating over these unpalatable topics, and at the same time finding out how great the relief this offer of the squire's had been, in the return of the anxieties which this loss of that offer brought—as he was engaged in this miserable train of thought, he suddenly remembered that a cheque was due to him from the editor of a well-known review, and, hoping to find the editor's letter among them, he drew out from his pocket the budget of letters he had that morning received, and which in his agitation at Nellie's sad epistle, and his consequent hasty departure, he had thrust away almost unconsciously. Here a surprise

was in store for him, for amongst the letters was one from no less a person than the Premier, speaking in the handsomest terms of his services to the party, both with his tongue in the House of Lords and with his pen in the press and the various reviews, and offering him as some small remuneration a place in the Government of some little importance, which had lately fallen vacant, and to which a comfortable salary was attached. Of course this was only the 'avant courier' of better things to come; it was a plain recognition of the place he had gained in his party, and opened up an almost boundless view to an ambitious man.

At first, and as he read the Minister's obliging sentences, and recognised the full meaning of this recognition of his services, the old keen longing to excel seized hold of him, and he indulged in proud visions as to what the future had in store. But he soon relapsed into his old despond-

ency, and, perhaps, had it not been for the iron hand of necessity, he would have refused the offer with all its contingent advantages. It has been said that love is only an incident, and that not a very important one, in the life of an ambitious man; but, be that as it may, while the fever-fit is at its height, it, at any rate, *assumes* an importance which, for the moment, dwarfs all other considerations. How proud Nellie would have been at this success of his! This was Lord Limborne's first thought as he awoke from his dreams of advancement; if only that fatal letter of his mother's had never been written, what man in this world more blessed than James, Lord Limborne! An assured position, an easy road to the goal of his ambition, the woman he loved to share his triumphs, and brighten his home, no sordid money troubles to hamper him; truly his would have been an enviable lot. But now, just at the very moment when *both*

the prizes of life, love and success, were within his grasp, a mocking fortune had snatched the one from his eager hands, and made the other distasteful and almost valueless. The only advantage he now saw in accepting his chief's offer was to be found in the fact that this would give him at once an excuse for continued absence from his home, and the means to keep up the two establishments which this absence necessitated.

Having once made up his mind, he lost no time, but as soon as he had secured a room at his hotel, and deposited his 'goods and chattels,' he hastened to make his acknowledgments to his great patron. He was fortunate enough to find the great man 'at home,' and after a short interchange of thanks on the one hand, and warm congratulations on the other, Lord Limborne left the 'official residence' as the new Under-Secretary for Home Affairs.

He had at once to enter upon his new

duties, and the next few days were full of work of a very hard sort ; his post was no sinecure, and of this he was glad, for in the stress of his public life he was able, for a while, to forget his private miseries. He soon found that the appointment was a most popular one, and had it not been for the loss of Nellie, which took all the savour out of everything, he would have been more than satisfied with the congratulations which poured in upon him, both in the words of his friends and acquaintances, and in the columns of the press ; but the bitterness of his disappointment was yet fresh upon him, and the thought of his Nellie was with him always. He knew she was at Hampstead, and see her he must. To call at her home was impossible after her father's letter to him, but the roads and the streets were free to him as to everyone, and, when he could get an hour or two to himself, Lord Limborne spent a considerable portion of that time

of leisure in proceeding to and from the town of Hampstead, and pervading the roads and lanes of that healthy and umbrageous suburb, with consequences of which more anon.

CHAPTER IV.

THERESA DENTON'S HOPES REVIVE.

As money is said to 'burn a hole' in the pocket of the extravagant, so a piece of news might be said to burn a hole in the fair bosom of Miss Charlotte Ingle. Tell it out to her particular cronies, and to the world at large, she must, and to be the first in the field, and the spectator of the hearer's astonishment, and to listen to the ejaculations of surprise, the queries, and speculations there-anent, was to Miss Ingle the very sauce and savour of life; while to find her market forestalled, and her news stale, was the bitterest disappointment an unkind fortune could send her.

Such a piece of news as she had gleaned in her visit to Lady Limborne *must* out, or consequences of the most serious nature would ensue. There was no hesitation in her mind as to who should be the first grateful recipients of her 'latest edition,' everything of course pointed to the Dentons; the doleful Henry's infatuation for Nellie, and Theresa Denton's somewhat pronounced pursuit of Lord Limborne, both these facts made it evident at once that no time must be lost before the parties concerned should know of this new turn events had taken. Miss Ingle burned with eagerness to tell her news, and to receive the accustomed payment in the astonishment of her hearers; and the unfortunate pony was again brought round from his comfortable stable, and urged unwillingly along the stony and rutty lanes, the nearest way to Wreford.

Miss Ingle calculated that she would get to Wreford a short half-hour before lunch, and she felt that the importance of her

news would quite earn for her the invitation to that refection—with which her morning visits to the Dentons usually ended—and as the Denton *ménage* was carried on in that way which is expressed by the words ‘no expense spared,’ and as Miss Ingle’s figure did not give the lie to her appreciation of the good things of this life, she enjoyed her drive, absorbed in the pleasures of anticipation, in spite of sundry ferocious joltings, and the general moistness of things which an autumnal mist brought about. It was to this muggy cloak which Nature puts on so often in lovely but humid Devon, that Charlotte Ingle owed the largeness of her audience when she ‘opened her pack.’ Everybody was at home, and the first greetings showed her that she was first in the field with her toothsome morsel of gossip, so she was able to dally with the *bonne bouche* and prolong her pleasure.

‘I *am* so glad to see you, Charlotte,’

said Theresa, her especial friend in the family, as she shook hands and pecked at her after the manner of feminine greetings. 'Emily and I were going to drive over this morning and beg lunch from you, only it turned out so horribly wet, and Emily wouldn't go, and I did not care to go alone.'

'I detest rain, and mud, and that sort of thing,' drawled the languid Emily; 'one feels it, even in a close carriage,' added that delicate young lady, who was not so very long ago only too delighted to take shelter in the homely 'bus,' when a hansom-cab was a dream of luxury strictly confined to the realms of the imaginary and never realised.

'Nonsense, Emily,' said her more robust sister, 'it is nothing but sheer laziness; you spend half your time lolling about in arm-chairs and reading novels, and no wonder you are always complaining.'

'Perhaps, Theresa dear,' rejoined her sister, in somewhat acid tones, 'if you were

as thin as me, and not so stout as you are, *you* would not think it necessary to rush about in the way you do; it is very annoying to persons of a lymphatic disposition.'

'Lymphatic? I suppose you picked that word up from that new doctor, young Selby, with whom you are going on in such a way. I am sure, I wonder mother does not interfere. Lymphatic!' added Theresa, with much scorn, for she was touched upon a sore spot, in her sister's allusion to her rather pronounced embonpoint. 'Lymphatic! if lymphatic means sour, and cross, and generally disagreeable, then I thank a merciful heaven that I am *not* lymphatic.'

'My *dear* Theresa, my *dear* Emily!' cried Mrs. Denton, interposing, as she too frequently had to interpose, as a peace-maker. 'Why *will* you go on in such a way? How often am I to tell you how excessively vulgar these squabbles are, and how

very much opposed to our position. You must excuse them, my dear Charlotte,' she went on, turning to Miss Ingle; 'you see, we treat you quite as one of the family, and Emily is not quite herself to-day, she is, indeed, under medical advice.'

'Young Selby to wit!' sneered Theresa, who had not yet got over her smart.

'Oh! I know Mr. Selby very well indeed,' interpolated the fair Charlotte, anxious to 'get a word in edgeways,' and put a stop to what seemed likely to end in a 'family row.' 'I know him quite well; he is a perfect gentleman, cousin of Sir Richard Selby, don't you know? They are not at all rich, the Selbys, but quite the nicest people. But, my dear Theresa, and Emily, and Mrs. Denton,' she went on, having got the ear of her company, and unable to keep her news to herself any longer. '*Have* you heard the news about Lord Limborne and Helen Armer?'

'Why, of course we have, Charlotte,'

said Theresa, looking at her friend with some astonishment. 'You were there, at Lady Porton's, yesterday, when we told you; whatever do you mean?'

'Oh! but, my dear, a great deal has happened since then,' returned Miss Ingle. Just then the portentous booming of a huge gong in the hall, upon which one of the canary-coloured flunkeys was wont to perform with the keenest satisfaction, announced that lunch was served, and effectually drowned all other sounds, including even the loud tones of the fair Charlotte. This din having died away in smothered rumblings, the other members of the interesting family put in their appearance and the company trooped into the dining-room. As has been before stated, the Dentons dispensed with the services of their domestics at the midday meal; and as soon as the company were seated, and the covers removed, the attendants disappeared, leaving their social

superiors to discourse at their own sweet will, untrammelled by that necessity to 'pick and choose' one's remarks which the presence of the servants entails. Small time was there given to Miss Ingle to satisfy the cravings of the abnormal appetite the long drive had engendered, and which the succulent dishes provoked to an alarming extent ; for, before she had masticated her first mouthful, the servants had vanished, and Theresa was 'down upon her.'

'Thank goodness those horrid servants are gone,' she said. 'Now, Charlotte, do tell us what you mean.'

'Why, what's up, Tresa?' asked her father; 'anyone'd think as the world was coming to an end, to see you so excited.' And even the abstracted Henry looked up at the eager tones of his sister.

'I wish you would not interrupt, father,' answered his daughter. 'Charlotte Ingle was just going to tell us something about

Lord Limborne, when the lunch-gong sounded. Do go on, Charlotte !

‘Lord Limborne, Lord Limborne !’ persisted Mr. Denton, ‘it’s nothing but Lord Limborne now ; he might be the Lord Mayor himself, for all the fuss there is about him.’

‘Oh ! do be quiet, father,’ chorussed his two daughters. ‘Now, Charlotte !’

‘Well, you know,’ said Charlotte, nothing loth, and having earnestly employed this brief interest in staying the first cravings of her hunger. ‘After you left Lady Porton’s, I just drove over to the Castle’

‘What castle, my dear ?’ asked the incorrigible interrupter, who was listening with all attention.

‘Why, Limborne Castle, of course,’ said Mrs. Denton ; ‘do be quiet, Henry.’

‘Well,’ went on Miss Ingle, ‘I drove up and found Lady Limborne in, and, of course, I congratulated her, you know, about what you told us at Lady Porton’s.’

‘If it ain’t like one of them stories in penny numbers!’ again interrupted Mr. Denton, who was bursting with curiosity, and could not restrain himself. ‘Whatever *did* they tell you?’

‘Oh, mother, I *wish* you would make father keep quiet; it is *too* provoking,’ said Emily roused from her usual torpidity, which torpidity was, indeed, largely assumed, under the idea that it was ‘fetching.’

‘Hoity, toity!’ exclaimed her father, getting angry. ‘Ain’t I to speak in my own house, please? Who’s master here, I should like to know?’

‘My dear Henry,’ said his wife, who could very easily have answered *that* question, ‘no one, I am sure, desires to interfere with your rights, but it is not considered the best of breeding to interrupt a lady when she is speaking.’

‘Oh, I suppose you mean to insinuate the “extra tuppence for manners” was not

paid when *I* went to school,' rejoined her spouse. 'Well, go on, go on; "live and learn," is my motto, and I never heard that a man wasn't allowed to speak at his own table before. Any way, I didn't mean any offence to *you*, my dear,' he added, turning to Miss Ingle, 'and I won't interrupt you any more.'

'Not at all! not at all!' Miss Ingle hastened to say, in answer to this ample apology. 'It was the news of Lord Limborne's engagement, which Mrs. Denton told us of, to which I was alluding.'

'Oh! quite so,' said Mr. Denton, politely; 'then why didn't they tell me so? Pray go on.'

'Well, I congratulated her, don't you know,' continued the fair narrator; 'and you will hardly believe me when I tell you, for it took me completely by surprise . . .' and she paused in the most artistic way, getting the curiosity of her hearers to fever-heat.

‘Well? well?’ was the almost breathless question from the Denton family.

‘To my utter astonishment,’ said Miss Ingle, slowly, and prolonging the keen enjoyment she felt in her story, ‘she refused to hear anything about it; she said she would never receive Helen Armer; in fact, she quite lost all control over herself, and went on in the most extraordinary way.’

‘Well, I never,’ said Mrs. Denton. ‘Who would have thought it? Such a proud woman as Lady Limborne.’

‘I can’t make it out myself,’ said Miss Ingle, ‘I never saw anyone so moved; so unlike Lady Limborne, as you say, Mrs. Denton; there must be something in the background.’

‘I fancy I know something about it,’ said Theresa, who had indeed studied the subject of Lord Limborne somewhat closely. ‘Do you remember those Beldons, mother?’ she asked her mother, who was

not likely to forget receiving such exalted personages, 'at our ball, don't you know?'

'Yes, of course I remember them, my dear,' said her mother, impatiently.

'Well,' resumed Theresa, 'I fancied there was something up between Lord Limborne and that Lady Emily.'

'“Something up!”' repeated her mother, who, even in the stress of excitement, did not forget her position of corrector-general to the family. '“Something up!” it is a perfect marvel to me where you pick up such extraordinary expressions; I must beg——'

'Oh, don't bother about expressions now, mother,' interrupted her daughter, rudely.

'But indeed I must and shall speak: “don't bother” is vulgar, and I must beg of you not to speak to me so flippantly;' and Mrs. Denton looked severely at her eldest daughter.

‘Yes, Tresa,’ said her father, delighted to find some one else under the lash; ‘you didn’t ought to speak to your mother like that. I’m astonished at you.’

‘Oh! very well; I’m sure I’m very sorry,’ carelessly rejoined his daughter, who was not so easily put down. ‘But you know, Charlotte,’ she went on, turning to her friend, who was busily engaged with her lunch, making up for lost time, and scarcely listening to the accustomed family wranglings; ‘anybody could see that there was something meant in it all; the more I think of it, the surer I am that those Beldons were not asked to Limborne Castle for nothing.’

‘I do believe you are right, Theresa,’ said Miss Ingle; ‘and now I think of it I *did* hearsomewhere or other some such a report. Anyhow, one thing is certain, and that is, that Lady Limborne will not receive Helen Armer as her daughter-in-law, and there’s an end of *that* match.’

‘Oh, those kind of people will not stay for such a thing as that,’ said Mrs. Denton, somewhat vaguely, and with a pleasing assumption of superiority. ‘Of course, Mr. Armer will be only too delighted to have a lord for his son-in-law, and Lady Limborne *must* come round in time.’

‘Well, I don’t know *much* about the Armers,’ rejoined Charlotte, ‘but I have always heard that he is as proud as Lucifer, and anyone looking at him can see what a temper he has. If Lady Limborne speaks to him as she spoke to me, you may depend upon it that that will put an end to the whole affair; and that she *will* do so I am as certain as that I sit here. I never saw anybody so determined.’

‘Well, ’Energry,’ said Mr. Denton, turning to his son, who had been a silent but attentive listener to the conversation reported above; ‘well, ’Energry, there’s a chance for you, my boy. I always did like that little Miss Armer; you go in

and win, my boy, catch her on the rebound, as the saying is, *I* shan't stand in your way. You ain't a lord, it's true, but if you play your cards all right, with all this money, nobody knows where you might get to.'

'I think it is time we retired, Miss Ingle,' said Mrs. Denton, severely, and rising, for she did not approve of the turn her husband had given to the conversation.

Miss Ingle took the hint, and the fair bevy soon quitted the dining-room followed by Henry Denton, who did not relish a *tête-à-tête* with his father, after that individual's last remark.

The conversation above reported furnished the subject-matter for much exercises of the mind to the large and lovely Theresa, her mother, and her brother Henry ; for if matters turned out as Charlotte Ingle imagined they would turn out, and if the engagement between Nellie

and Lord Limborne came to an untimely end, then the field would be open to other competitors, and why should not Mrs. Denton and her daughter have their heart's desire fulfilled in the 'elevation of Theresa Denton to the peerage' under the style and title of Theresa, Lady Limborne? This dazzling prospect formed the 'agenda' at several solemn conclaves of two, and the ways and the means towards the attainment of this end were discussed without any reserve by mother and daughter in the 'boodoor' (as Mr. Denton called it) and strictly with closed doors.

Theresa was of a sanguine disposition; she was perfectly well aware of her personal attractions, and also of the pecuniary advantages which decidedly enhanced these attractions. She knew of the 'poverty of the land' at Limborne Castle, and she had great hopes that by hook or by crook she would be able to supplant Nellie and reign as the fair chatelaine of Limborne. It is

true that the lady-mother was a difficult obstacle to tackle, but, if she could only bring his lordship up to the proposing point, she felt that no proud scruples, either on her own or her parent's part could stand in *her* way. She could afford to ignore any opposition on Lady Limborne's part; and, indeed, she felt perfectly able to do battle with that lady if occasion demanded; neither had she any fears as to the result of such a conflict. 'Possession,' in Theresa's creed, 'was nine points of the law,' and, once possessed of Lord Limborne's hand and name, she felt herself to be perfectly able to 'keep the dowager in her place.' How to set to work, however, was the problem; with the late autumn, and winter close at hand, would come a deadly dull time, with opportunities for meeting few and far between. The hunting-field was out of the question; for, besides the fact that Lord Limborne did not very often put in an

appearance there, Theresa was but a new hand at that sort of thing, very timid, and conscious of not showing to the best advantage outside the Arab steed.

Mrs. Denton suggested a house full of visitors and a big Christmas gathering, but against this plan was the fact that as yet the Dentons were not upon such a footing of intimacy with the county folk as to warrant them in proposing a long visit, with any chance of the proposal being accepted. Nor did they know the Limbornes well enough to ask them to stay in the house, and, if they *had* been upon such footing with that family, their invitation stood an excellent chance of being refused. Altogether Theresa was compelled to own that she must wait upon time and opportunity, and Mrs. Denton had reluctantly come to the same conclusion, when the announcement of Lord Limborne's appointment in the *Times*, which announcement Mr. Denton read out to the family party,

provided a solution to the difficulty which mother and daughter were quick to observe and improve. His new duties would necessarily compel his presence in London, and, though the Dentons' advent in London society was to have been delayed till the next season, both Theresa and Mrs. Denton felt that no time was to be lost, and they determined to put off the trip to the South of France which was to have whiled away the winter, and to go up to London as soon as possible. As to their plans for 'establishing a footing' in society, and thus finding opportunities for meeting Lord Limborne, more anon.

The Limborne-Armer fiasco afforded much mental pabulum to another member of this interesting family, and the fond and faithful Henry saw, in the possible breaking off of the engagement, a chance for him to 'disclose his pains,' and, as his father somewhat vulgarly put it, 'go in, and win.' He determined, with that end

in view, to go up to London, thinking with his usual infatuation that he could easily get upon terms of intimacy with the Armer family, and that, in her soreness at the treatment she had received at Lady Limborne's hands, Nellie would eagerly embrace the chance he would give her of showing her indifference, and 'rounding' upon her enemies, by accepting his noble offer, and becoming the bride of a future millionaire. As a first step in this direction, he had already ventured his attenuated form upon the portly barrel of a cob, 'warranted quiet in saddle and in harness,' and, with his thin legs looking still more spidery in breeches and gaiters, he had proceeded with fear and trepidation to Coombridge to pay a farewell visit to the Armers before they should leave for London, and to find out their London address with a view to future operations. He found, however, that his toilsome and dangerous venture was in vain in *one*

particular, for the birds were flown ; but he gained his wish in the other particular, and painfully returned to Wreford with the name and the place of the Armers' new abode, which he obtained from the caretaker.

Great was his disgust at finding, on his return, the subject of the whole Denton family's migration to London an established fact, for he dreaded lest his sharp-witted sisters should find out his intended 'goings-on,' and get him under the dreaded lash of their sarcastic tongues. He felt no time was to be lost, and, saying he wanted a change and would go up and look after a house for the family party, the next day he departed for the great metropolis. And so Nellie had two lovers in London, both of them earnestly bent upon an interview and an opportunity to 'urge their claims.'

CHAPTER V.

NELLIE'S GODFATHER.

To those who are not cheered by the prospects of the joys of the hunting-field, and the various happy employments of the all-round sportsman, there is something peculiarly dismal in the country-side in that period of the year when the last feeble flutterings of summer are over, and the cold and raw, or moist and muggy time of expiring autumn is come.

This had always been Nellie's least-liked season at Coombridge; the spring, the summer, and the early autumn she loved, and winter, too, was pleasant enough, but

the 'betwixt and between' time she abominated, and had usually contrived to have important business in London connected with the exigencies of the winter toilet, which involved a stay of some two or three weeks in that capital. Until the quarrel between her father and Mr. Gidley she had been wont to make her god-father's house her head-quarters during these periods, and greatly had Mr. Gidley delighted in gallanting his lovely god-daughter to such diversions in the way of concerts and theatres as that exacting young lady had chosen. In fact that gentleman, and the motherly old parson's widow who presided over his household 'for a consideration,' had been used to look forward to Nellie's annual advent as to a very pleasant break in a somewhat monotonous life, and 'when Nellie is here,' or 'since Nellie went,' had become dates in the domestic calendar.

As the time for Nellie's visit to the dull house in Bedford Square drew near, Mr.

Gidley began to find himself very often thinking of that young lady, and when the ancient dame afore-mentioned asked him one morning 'whether Miss Nellie was coming up this year?' Mr. Gidley realised how much he missed the occasional glimpses of our heroine, which his journeys to Devonshire had given him, and how he had looked forward to her autumnal visit as to his one yearly holiday from the quiet dulness of his every-day life. As he walked towards his accustomed haunts in the city, on the morning of his house-keeper's inquiry, he bitterly regretted his own sarcastic tongue, and the squire's ready temper, the causes of their estrangement, and the barriers between him and the only mortal he regarded with anything more than ordinary complaisance.

He knew the obstinacy of his late partner, and he knew also that this obstinacy was very strongly 'set' against him; for, in the last interview which the disentangle-

ment of their affairs had demanded, Mr. Armer had told his partner plainly enough that he did not desire Mr. Gidley's acquaintance, and should be the better pleased if for the future they behaved to one another as strangers. To this rude enough speech Mr. Gidley had vouchsafed no reply, and when they met, as now and again they did meet, they had passed each other without any sign of recognition. It would be very difficult, therefore, for any reconciliation to take place; it would entail a certain 'eating of humble pie' on Mr. Gidley's part (for he knew well enough that no motion towards 'making it up' would come from the other side), and 'humble pie' was a dish not at all to Mr. Gidley's taste; yet for Nellie's sake, because he longed to see her again, and to be once more on the old familiar footing with his pretty god-daughter, the old gentleman determined to swallow the nasty morsel, and to try to be 'acquaintances'

if not friends again with his old partner, Nellie's father. To this end, and after much cogitation, he determined to call at Heathfield, and see Nellie, and consult with her as to how her father could best be 'brought round.'

He had kept his eye on the movements of the Armer family, as well as he could, since the rupture of the partnership, and he knew well enough that a general move to Hampstead on their part was in prospect, when the sight of the squire, whom he met in one of the tortuous alleys of the City, informed him that the move had been made, and that he would probably find his god-daughter in her Hampstead home. Mr. Gidley rightly supposed that the morning would be the most likely time to find her at home; and so, one morning, some few days after the Armers' arrival at Heathfield, Mr. Gidley stood at the door of that 'desirable villa residence,' and gazed curiously at Nellie's new surround-

ings as he waited for a response to his vigorous pull at the door-bell.

Now Nellie received the name of Gidley, which the faithful Hudson brought up, with mingled feelings of pleasure and alarm: pleasure at the prospect of seeing and talking with her godfather who, whatever he might be to others, was always kindness itself to her; and alarm as to how her father would take this visit on the part of his enemy. For as an enemy Mr. Armer had got to look upon his old partner, and Nellie shuddered as she remembered the frequent objurgation with which the squire saluted the name of Gidley, and how only that very morning (moved by an abnormal 'rise' in some securities in which he knew the aforesaid Gidley to be largely engaged) he had indulged himself in language certainly not scriptural as to the habits and character of his late partner, and the way that late partner had treated him, Mr. Armer. At any rate,

here Mr. Gidley was, waiting in the morning-room, and probably wondering why she was so long in coming; so Nellie ran lightly down the stairs from her own peculiar sanctum, and found her godfather eagerly expecting her.

‘My dear Nellie,’ he cried, as he took the privilege of his age and position, and saluted the cheek of that fair damsel, ‘you are surprised to see me, I know, but I will explain it all presently. Let me look at you, my dear,’ he went on, leading her to the window; ‘why, Nellie, how’s this? Where is your bonny rosy colour, Nellie? Has the air of London already stolen the roses from you? But that’s all fudge, for the air of London is the finest in the world, and much healthier than the tainted air of undrained country villages. You are not looking yourself, my dear; is there anything wrong? Master Jack been worrying you about his scrapes, eh?’

Now Nellie found it anything but easy to

answer the questions the old gentleman poured out upon her so profusely, for the questions brought all the old troubles to her mind again, and she could hardly speak as she thought of the true cause of her pale cheeks and thin outlines. Not much peace of mind had Nellie had since that day when Lady Limborne's letter had put an end to all her happy dreams.

‘Oh! I am quite well, Mr. Gidley,’ she said, ‘and delighted to see my godfather again.’

‘Well, Nellie,’ said Mr. Gidley, ‘old Mrs. Rose and I could not stand it any longer, you know. This is the time you always come to us, and we want you to come and brighten up the old house again.’

‘Oh, Mr. Gidley,’ said Nellie, sadly, ‘you don't know how angry father is; you know how he has turned against you, and he is so strong in his likes and dislikes. Why did you quarrel with him? I fear he will

never let me come and see you'

'It was just about this very thing that I called,' interrupted Mr. Gidley; 'the fact is, my dear, that I miss you very much, and . . . in short, I wanted to consult with you as to how this . . . ah . . . this unfortunate affair with your father could be made up; now, what do you think about it, Nellie? Can't you and I lay our heads together, and make up some plan or other, eh, my dear?'

'I don't know *what* to say,' said Nellie; 'why, it was only this morning'
and she stopped herself, for she could not repeat her father's remarks to Mr. Gidley.

'Well, never mind, my dear,' said Mr. Gidley, with a somewhat wry face, 'I can easily fill up the blank; it is plain that your father has not forgotten old scores. Now, what do you say to a letter? I have made up my mind to a dish of humble pie, and you know better than I do the sort of seasoning your father would like to have

it dressed with ; so, here's pen and ink, there's no time like the present, and if you and I cannot compose an epistle calculated to soften the heart of a stone, well, I'm very much mistaken ;' and Mr. Gidley's unwonted flow of eloquence ran dry, as he placed a seat for Nellie at the writing-table, and arranged the materials for their joint effort at composition.

Now this letter, touching as it did upon delicate points, and requiring a large amount of consideration, took a very long time in the making, and so engrossed were the two conspirators that they did not mark the alarming way in which the hands of the clock were passing the quarters and the half-hours, so that they were altogether taken aback when Hudson, entering to announce lunch, found them surrounded with the torn relics of their mental struggles, and Nellie dictating, while her godfather was writing out a fair copy of the result of their labours.

Nellie could not very well send her godfather empty away, and Mr. Gidley could not resist the charms of a *tête-à-tête* meal with his fair friend. They lingered over the meal, chatting pleasantly, and it was close upon three o'clock before Mr. Gidley bade farewell to Nellie, and started in search of a hansom to take him home to Bedford Square.

Now it chanced that Mr. Armer found but little stirring in the City that day, and not feeling over well (for, in truth, the change in his habits and the altogether altered conditions of life were telling in a marked way upon his health), the squire determined that he would make an early move towards home, and, perhaps, catch his daughter before she drove out, and accompany her in her drive ; so, hastily swallowing a sandwich and a glass of sherry at his City club, he jumped into a hansom and drove Hampsteadwards. Heathfield House stood in a lane which ran at

right angles from the main road, and speechless with rage was the squire, on rounding the abrupt corner, to see his particular enemy and old partner calmly proceeding down his own doorsteps!

Mr. Gidley recognised the squire, and making up his mind in a moment, he waited till the cab drew up to the kerbstone, and came forward to speak to the squire.

‘Not a word, sir! Not a word, sir!’ cried the squire, in a voice positively hoarse with rage.

‘Now, let me explain, Armer . . .’ Mr. Gidley called out.

‘I won’t hear you, sir,’ cried the squire, hastily rumaging in his waistcoat-pocket and paying his fare with such an unusual and splendid liberality in his agitation that the cabman, resisting the keen desire to ‘see the row’ common to his fraternity, gathered up his reins and drove off rapidly, lest his fare should find out his mistake.

The squire ran up the steps with unwonted agility, followed more slowly by the expostulating Gidley ; and, hastily fixing his latch-key in the door, he entered his house in a perfect tornado of wrath, slamming the door in Mr. Gidley's face, and dismissing him in a shower of ' blessings ' not fit for ears polite.

By this time Mr. Gidley's ire was roused to fever heat, and, muttering objurgations at the senseless rage of his late partner, he turned on his heels and quickly walked away.

Nellie had been a spectator of this anything but amusing scene (to *her*, at least), and, not waiting to hear more than the ' opening fire ' of the great guns her father brought to bear upon the enemy's position, she rushed upstairs and shut herself in, in her own room, to avoid the hurricane which seemed imminent. If the squire's rage was hot while it lasted, it was quickly over, though it left an unpleasant ' ground-

swell' of abiding hostility which was long, indeed, in subsiding. So, after a tremulous interval of a quarter-of-an-hour, which began in the banging of doors and much loud-voiced direction to Hudson, and ended in perfect silence, the more still from the noise that preceded it, Nellie ventured downstairs, to find her father in his library, in the state of complete exhaustion which now followed on his fits of exasperation. The squire was looking ill and pale, and his daughter felt an icy chill at her heart as she marked the too evident effects of the explosion. She went up to her father and kissed him; and the squire, who was in truth somewhat ashamed of his outbreak, began to make explanations.

'You need not look so frightened, Nellie,' he said; 'it's enough to make a man mad, to see that—that fellow coming down my doorsteps. What on earth did he come here for! the impertinence, the insolence . . .' and the remembrance of

Mr. Gidley's audacity was making the squire warm again when Nellie interrupted him.

'He wanted to see me, father,' she said, hesitating, and fearing as to how her father would take it.

'See you !' said the squire. 'What does he want to see you for? How *dare* he come to my house? We shall have that fellow Limborne here next, "wanting to see you," and the whole crew of them. It's intolerable that a man can't keep even his own house to himself. However, I shan't be troubled with *that* man again, for I have given orders to Hudson never to admit him—Gidley, I mean.'

Nellie saw it was no use to speak to her father whilst he was still simmering with scarcely suppressed rage, so she stood by him a little while, until he had talked himself into a more rational frame of mind, and after seeing him comfortably employed with a soothing cigar, and his favourite

newspaper, she went out to see if a blow upon the breezy heath would drive away the headache which all this noise and agitation had given her.

Now there is at Hampstead a certain road between that suburb and Highgate, called by the inhabitants of Hampstead 'the Broad Walk,' and much resorted to by those inhabitants, inasmuch as from its broad and gravelled sidewalks a most extended view can be obtained: on the north side over a wide stretch of beautiful country, and on the south side over the acres upon acres, and miles upon miles covered by far-famed London town. Moreover, there is always a pleasant breeze to be met with there. To this, her accustomed place of exercise, did Nellie 'wend her way,' pondering many things in her mind, and all unsuspecting of evil. The close of the November day was already shutting out the landscape on the one side, and on the other the 'Lights of Lon-

don' were beginning to twinkle out, as Nellie, having reached the end of her walk, turned her face towards home. There were but few people abroad; the children who usually abound in that place had already gone home with their nurses, and the chilly evening air was making the stray pedestrians hasten their steps towards the warm fireside of dulce domum. But Nellie was thinking many thoughts, and she did not feel the cold. She was walking slowly along, looking upon the ground, and wondering what her quondam lover was doing, wondering whether he would soon forget her, whether she should ever see him again, when the quick approach of a passer-by caused her to look up, and she found herself face to face with that lover himself.

Her first impulse was to turn round, and hasten away in the opposite direction, but Lord Limborne was quickly by her side.

‘Nellie! Nellie!’ he cried, ‘I implore

you not to leave me ; I *must* speak to you, I have been looking for you almost every day ; you *must* hear me !

‘It is of no use, Lord Limborne,’ said Nellie, turning at last, and trying to obtain composure in the gathering darkness, and to speak calmly. ‘It is of no use, and it is cruel to torture me like this. How can I have any chance of peace, if I know that I may meet you at any time?’

‘Only hear me for one instant,’ implored Lord Limborne ; ‘you could not expect that I should let all end between us without seeing you, or speaking to you ? I love you still, Nellie, I shall always love you . . .’

‘I cannot, I must not listen to you, James,’ she cried. ‘Oh ! how *can* you be so cruel to me, when it is all so hard, so hard to bear. I beg you to leave me, and *never* to speak to me again. It is all so miserably hopeless, and I ought not to speak to you now.’

‘Why is it so hopeless, Nellie?’ he asked,

eagerly. 'Will you let the silly pride of my mother interfere between us and the happiness of both of us?'

'It is not only that, James,' replied Nellie; 'you forget that *we* are proud also. I have promised my father that I will not listen to you; neither would *I* submit to the insults of Lady Limborne.'

'Are you so heartless, Nellie? Will you let all these miserable feelings come between us now? Why cannot we break through it all?'

'You ask me to do more than I can,' said Nellie. 'How could I leave my home, and my father, and Jack? I can look Lady Limborne in the face *now*, but she would rightly despise me if I were to do as you want. And do you suppose *I* am not wretched? Ah! for pity's sake, spare me this added misery and leave me. It can never be! it can never be!' and Nellie's voice broke as she held out her hand to her lover, and bade him farewell.

They had been walking rapidly, for Nellie had hurried on in her agitation, and had come to the place where the broad walk was merged into the road to the town of Hampstead, and where was the turning that led to Heathfield, as she uttered these last words. Lord Limborne saw that it would be worse than cruel for him to urge his suit any further, and sorrowfully looking a last long look into Nellie's face, and bending down and kissing her hand, he said, earnestly,

‘Remember, Nellie, I will never give you up!’ and with a muttered and fervent ‘God bless you always, Nellie darling!’ he slowly took his way down the hill.

CHAPTER VI.

‘GREAT IS MONEY, AND IT SHALL PREVAIL.’

MR. HENRY DENTON, junior, lost no time, but sought the very earliest opportunity to lay before the object of his devotion the brilliant prospects which fortune had in store for her; and to this end, early in the afternoon of the day after his arrival in London, he chartered a hansom, and, arrayed in the most unimpeachable of calling ‘gets-up’ he drove to Hampstead—to be informed by Hudson that the Armer family were ‘not-at-home.’ Having received this knock-down blow, he returned to his hotel in a desponding frame of mind, leav-

ing cards upon his friends(?), and making up his mind to call again after a decent interval. Not having any other friends in London, he would have found time a heavy burden on his hands during this interval, if it had not been for the house-hunting to which he was pledged, and concerning which quest he received daily epistles from his fond mother, setting forth the requirements as to situation and size, and exhorting him to haste. As there was no limit as to expense, the difficulty in finding what was wanted was not great, and in a couple of days he was in treaty with the house-agent for a very well-known and palatial mansion in Piccadilly, which had just come into the market through the death of the previous noble lessee.

His letter describing the magnificence of this abode, and the glory and splendour of the furniture and fittings (which were shortly to be brought to the hammer) excited feelings of curiosity, and a strong

desire for the possession of such a point of advantage from which to storm and carry the serried ranks of society, in the bosoms of Mrs. Denton and her daughters ; as to the head of the family, he cared not a jot about the matter, and gave his wife carte-blanche, only stipulating that he should be left alone, and free to return to his beloved ' 'eating-'ouses,' his orchids, and other 'store-plants,' as soon and as often as he chose. To this proviso Mrs. Denton made no demur, for she saw in her husband's dislike to the trammels of London life an easy way of escape from a difficulty which had greatly oppressed her mind. No amount of training, no lessons, corrections, nor exhortations could subdue the vulgarity of her good-natured spouse, and she was compelled, with many sighs of regret, to own that all the luxury of his surroundings could not change the character and habits of Mr. Denton ; for nearly sixty years he had lived and moved in the

social atmosphere of the small and fairly prosperous tradesman, and to the day of his death he would continue to act and speak up to that character. As he often said himself, when she tried to cure him of some obnoxious habit or other, or to induce him to mend his speech, or to struggle valiantly with the fatal aspirate : ‘ He was too old a dog to learn new tricks.’

And though, as she well knew, society will stand a great deal from a monstrously wealthy man, yet ‘Enery Denton, as he called himself, was *too* much, and possessed a fund of vulgarity heavy enough to sink a whole cargo of millionaires.

‘I can’t think’ he said, as they were discussing his son’s communication anent the house at breakfast, ‘I can’t think what on earth you *want* a house in London for; if you, and Tresa, and Emily want to go up to town to buy fall-lals, and see the theaytres, why can’t you go to a ‘otel? What do you want to bother about a

house for? Look at the expense of it.’

‘*I* appreciate my duty to my children if *you* do not, Henry,’ said Mrs. Denton. ‘My one desire is to see them suitably settled in the position to which their prospects entitle them, and to that end I will spare no trouble.’

‘You know yourself, mother,’ said the plain-spoken Theresa, ‘that you are longing to make a flare in London, and get into society.’

‘Well, my dear,’ said her mother, ‘and why shouldn’t I, pray? the two things go together, and you cannot secure advantageous marriages, unless we are known. And as to expense, Henry,’ she went on, addressing her husband, ‘I wonder at your mentioning such a thing; in what better way could we spend our money than in taking up our proper position in the world, and connecting ourselves with the aristocracy?’

‘Well, well!’ said the easy-going husband, ‘do as you like, do as you like, but don’t expect *me* to go bowing and scraping about like a monkey on a barrel organ; what I like is to be comfortable, and that’s what I mean to be, too, it’s the only good I’ve got out of brother Ben’s money.’

‘You needn’t trouble, father, I’m sure,’ said Emily, seeing (together with her mother and sister) the advantages this determination of her father’s held out. ‘Henry will be with us, and look after everything.’

‘Enery indeed! a fine lot of looking after he’ll do; why, he’s as silly as a sheep, and those London chaps ’ll do him at every turn. If it was only him up there, I should go up myself. But there’s your mother, my dears, and it ’ll take a sharp ’un to do *her*, I know;’ and Mr. Denton strolled out of the room, chuckling to him-

self at the idea of *any* one getting over his shrewd wife.

That estimable woman and her daughters were not long in making up their minds as to the plan of the campaign, and the next day saw the excellent trio installed in a comfortable suite of apartments in a fashionable hotel in London, and before many more days were over the legal preliminaries were duly surmounted, various documents were forwarded to Mr. Denton at Wreford, and returned signed, sealed, and delivered, and the Dentons were the proud possessors of No. 751, Piccadilly, late the residence of the Most Noble the Marquis of——.

It is one thing to possess a magnificent mansion, and it is another thing to fill that mansion with the sort of guests that Mrs. Denton’s soul loved. It is not to be supposed, however, that that astute lady, and the little less acute coadjutors, her

daughters, had entered into this campaign without counting the cost, surveying their ground, reviewing their forces, and taking unto themselves powerful allies.

As Miss Charlotte Ingle had announced her intention to 'run the Dentons in society,' so, so far, she had faithfully fulfilled her promises. To this fact the great Denton ball at Wreford, and the numerous entries in the visitors' book of that establishment, bore ample witness. It had been *difficult* at first to bring about this desirable state of affairs in South Devon, but to put her protégées on the same footing in society in London, Miss Ingle frankly confessed was beyond the utmost stretch of her power, backed up as that power was by an amount of push and 'cheek' practically inexhaustible.

But the difficulties only served to rouse Miss Ingle's amiable qualities to their highest pitch, and, when called upon by Mrs. Denton to assist in the Denton avatar,

she responded with enthusiasm, and cheered by the benedictions of her sister, who took almost as much interest in the matter as herself, and exacted a promise of daily bulletins, she bade that sister a fond farewell, and appeared at the Dentons' new and magnificent abode the very afternoon after she heard from Mrs. Denton of their entry into that palatial residence.

'I'm sure, Charlotte,' said Theresa, after that fair spinster had 'taken off her things,' and removed the signs of her journey, and as the four conspirators were solacing themselves with a cup of tea, before going through the arduous operation of dressing for dinner—'I'm sure, Charlotte, we are all infinitely obliged to you for coming up so quickly.'

'Not a bit, my dear,' answered Charlotte. 'I'm delighted to come; you can't think how dull it is down in Devonshire, nothing going on at all; besides I want some new gowns, and I've all sorts of commis-

sions for Mary, too. My dear Mrs. Denton,' she went on, turning to that lady, 'you look quite worn out; it was time I came to look after you.'

'Well, Charlotte, I confess I *am* almost worn out, for Henry, poor boy, is absolutely useless in anything that has to do with business, and the girls and I have had to do everything.'

'What have you done about servants? I see some of the Wreford men are here,' said Charlotte.

'We have been fortunate enough to take on some of the old servants of the house; they had excellent characters from the marchioness,' said Mrs. Denton.

'Oh! the marchioness,' exclaimed Miss Ingle; 'then you have seen her, spoken to her?'

'Oh! yes,' said Mrs. Denton; 'you know we have bought all the furniture, everything, in fact, and there were some few things that Lady — wanted, so she was

kind enough to call on us at the hotel about them.’

‘Capital, capital!’ cried out Charlotte, ‘if we can only get her to recognise us, that will be a great step gained.’

‘Of course, Charlotte,’ said Theresa, eager to put in a word, ‘it is about this we are so anxious; it would be too awful if, after going to all this frightful expense, it came to nothing, and people turned a cold shoulder upon us.’

‘Well, my dears,’ said Charlotte, looking round at her audience, ‘I have thought it all out, and I *think* I have hit upon a plan which *must* succeed,—not that it’s a new plan, for it has often been done before. Now, you must pledge me your word that you will never breathe a syllable to anyone about what I am going to propose.’

‘Of course! Not a word!’ chorused the mother and daughters.

‘Not that I suppose you would, for it

would be telling a tale against yourselves, if you did,' said Miss Ingle, enigmatically. 'Of course,' she went on, 'you already know a fair circle of nice people, but of some of them, and those the most important, I am not at all sure. You do not mind me speaking plainly?' she asked, pausing and looking at Mrs. Denton.

'Not in the least; say exactly what you think, Charlotte,' said Mrs. Denton, listening with great earnestness.

'Some of them I am not sure of,' Miss Ingle repeated; 'they may be willing enough to know you down there, but they may scarcely recognise you *here*; it is often done, and some people are quite content to be only known in their own county; but this, of course, is out of the question with you. I cannot do any more for you myself than I have done.' (Here murmurs of thanks from her audience interrupted the fair speaker.) 'I cannot do more myself, but I *think*, mind I am not *sure*, but I think

I can get some one else to do what you want. You know Lady Leveret?’ she asked, somewhat abruptly.

‘Oh! yes,’ all answered eagerly; for, indeed, who does *not* know that great leader of the *haute monde*?

‘Of course you do, and you know, too, for I have often mentioned it’ (which was, indeed, an incontrovertible fact), ‘that Lady Leveret is my cousin. Well, you know, I know her very well indeed, in fact, I think I know more about her than anyone else; she has sent for me more than once, and I have been able to help her in one or two well, there is no need for me to go into particulars. Now I am going to tell you something which I *must* tell you to explain myself, and which must be kept perfectly secret, or you will upset everything, and, worse than that, make an enemy of my cousin. It was only two or three days ago, when I was thinking over what was to be done here, that I had a letter

from Lady Leveret;’ and here Miss Ingle paused, evidently hesitating before she divulged the contents of that letter.

‘Yes! yes! Well? well?’ breathlessly exclaimed her excited auditory, leaning forward to hear what the secret was and how it could affect them.

‘Everybody knows,’ resumed Miss Ingle, ‘how frightfully rich Lord Leveret is—coal-mines, and all that sort of thing, you know,—but everybody does *not* know how dreadfully *mean* he is. Of course a person in my cousin’s position, with so many establishments to keep up, and such a reputation for entertaining, has the most enormous expenses, and . . . well, the truth is, that Lady Leveret has had great difficulty in getting the necessary supplies from her husband before this, and, I will not disguise it from you, it has been the cause of some little unpleasantness between them. Well, I heard from her the other day that it is absolutely necessary she

should have a certain sum by a certain date, and unless this sum is forthcoming she *must* apply to Lord Leveret, and very painful consequences will ensue. Now, Lady Leveret has written to me to advise her in the matter, and . . . well ! do you see *now* what I mean ?’

‘ I think I do,’ said Mrs. Denton ; ‘ you mean that *we* should’

‘ Precisely so,’ interrupted Miss Ingle ; ‘ of course, it is a most *delicate* affair, and must be arranged in such a manner as not to wound my cousin’s feelings. I have not even hinted at such a thing yet, and I cannot possibly tell how she will take it ; I know, however, that she is *very* hard pressed, and it is just possible that I may bring her to some arrangement.’

‘ What am I to do, then ?’ asked Mrs. Denton ; ‘ I have never even seen Lady Leveret. I suppose it would not do for me to call, or should I *write* to her ?’

‘ Gracious Heavens !’ exclaimed the

cousin of the 'party concerned,' 'that would never do! it would put an end to the affair at once. My cousin is as proud as Lucifer. *You* must not appear at all, it would be *too* shocking; neither, supposing I find her willing to help you, must any mention ever be made of the . . . the arrangement.'

'But how . . .?' asked Mrs. Denton, somewhat mystified as to the ways and the means.

'I know that my cousin is in town,' answered Miss Ingle, 'and I know I shall find her at home in the morning, for she seldom appears before lunch; and to-morrow I will go and sound her, for the sooner we begin the better. If I can only get her to agree, the thing is done, for where she goes everyone will follow.'

'It is so good of you to take all this trouble, my dear Charlotte,' said Mrs. Denton, with effusion; and her daughters chimed in, and agreed with that sentiment,

while the impetuous Theresa went over and embraced her friend, and called her 'a dear thing.'

'Pray don't mention it,' said the 'dear thing.' 'I am only too glad to be of service to you.' And no doubt she was; for even if Miss Ingle did not succeed in extracting a neat little commission in £ s. d., as some people in like circumstances would have done, from the 'arrangement,'—of which, to do her justice, she did not even think—she would, at any rate, add another to the obligations the powerful Lady Leveret was already under to her useful cousin, and she was quite determined to exact the payment of these obligations to the very last farthing, if not in pelf, at least in the glory of seeing the name of Miss Ingle tagged on to the list of noble and famous guests entertained by Lord and Lady Leveret at such and such a castle or house.

Dire indeed was the strait in which the

great leader of 'ton,' and Miss Ingle's cousin, found herself. Some two or three years before she had been fortunate enough to make 'the match of the season;' her parents were well-born, but not particularly wealthy, and her extreme beauty and charming manners had won for her the exalted position to which she had attained as the wife of one of the richest peers in England, and the leader of quite one of the most exclusive sets in 'fashionable society.' But,—the inevitable 'but' appeared at length, and Lord Leveret had, in quite the early stages of matrimonial bliss, shown signs of restiveness under the painful revelations which his cheque-book divulged as to the inordinate extravagance of his beautiful wife, and 'scenes' of a most unpleasant sort had been uncomfortably frequent. Under these circumstances Lady Leveret had been reduced to very painful expedients to satisfy her cormorant tradespeople, without applying too frequently to

her husband. And now things were desperate indeed, for Madame Coraline was not to be pacified without a substantial ‘sop,’ and *every* expedient towards ‘raising the wind’ had been long ago exhausted, even to the interviews in the back room of one of the West End establishments of those mighty genii of the Three Golden Balls, Messrs.—, and Lady Leveret was come upon evil days, and in the very deepest depths of despair. Miss Ingle, therefore, found a ready and eager listener when, on the morning after her consultation with Mrs. Denton, she unfolded her tale in Lady Leveret’s boudoir, and that mighty leader of society hailed with the keenest satisfaction the way of escape this tale afforded. The question soon resolved itself into the small compass of ‘how much?’ and, that question having been answered, Miss Ingle departed from the presence with a glow of virtuous satisfaction at her heart. As Mrs. Denton had ‘carte blanche’

from that man of millions, her husband, and as she had an acute perception of the value (in *her* eyes) of the 'quid pro,' she made no difficulty as to the sum demanded, though the number of 0's after the initial figure *did* make her open her eyes ; and so the 'arrangement' was completed without even the principals to it seeing one another.

Shortly after the affair was thus satisfactorily settled (greatly to the astonishment of Madame Coraline, who was behind the scenes, and looking for a visit of a not very pleasant character from Lord Leveret, or his 'man of business') the exceedingly well-appointed brougham of Lady Leveret 'might have been seen' standing outside the door of No. 751, Piccadilly, and bitterly did that fashionable lady its owner's men curse their fate, as they waited in the bleak and raw November air, while a long consultation was going on between their mistress, her cousin, and her new friend (?)

Soon after this consultation the fame of the Dentons' millions (with prodigious exaggerations) became whispered about 'in the world,' and great curiosity was expressed as to the new occupants of the well-known mansion No. 751. The fact, too, that Lady Leveret had taken them up, very quickly became known, and she was besieged with questions as to 'who they were?' and 'where they came from?' and 'how she picked them up?' 'Friends of my cousin, Charlotte Ingle, don't you know? you *must* have met her at Leveret House; disgustingly rich, ever so many millions, and quite nice people,' was her ladyship's answer, with the result that many high and mighty folk desired the honour of an introduction to Mrs. Denton at the next big 'crush' at Leveret House, which 'crush' was more crowded than ever, inasmuch as it was well known beforehand that the new millionaires were to be present. And so, behold Mrs. Denton at

the very summit of her ambition, admitted to the 'best houses,' her own receptions crowded with persons (and even personages) of the very highest distinction; and, as you behold, bow down to the great God Mammon; for great is money, and it shall prevail!

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATE OF HENRY DENTON.

Now the love-lorn Henry Denton had not been idle during these weeks, occupied by his family in ascending social Alpine heights ; into the vortex he was perforce dragged, and a not unimportant item was he in the social success of his family, for if Theresa was found to be lovely, as she certainly was, and that in a very 'large way,' and if her somewhat pronounced way of 'saying what she meant' was looked upon as 'chic,' and piquante, and was, in fact, not in the least more *outré* than the manners and customs of some of the

very highest of society dames ; and if the fair Emily was regarded as an interesting addition to the more languid pursuers of 'culture' (for æstheticism was then gaining many adherents, and Emily was not slow to seize her chance, and pathetically denounce the general Philistinism); and if Mrs. Denton was deemed 'quite nice, don't you know, and so *enormously* rich,' the son and heir of all this fabulous wealth was the object of universal regard, and received attentions from the hands of the 'mothers in (fashionable) Israel,' and from the daughters of those mothers, too, which filled the heart of his own ambitious parent with a keen delight she was not slow in communicating to that much-sought-after representative of pelf.

The faithful swain in question was not slow in seeing how his enhanced importance would fight against his mother's acceptance of his beloved Nellie as a daughter, and he made up his mind to put an

end to his suspense at once. This, however, was not easy of accomplishment; for, though he had called several times at Heathfield, he had never yet had a chance of speaking to the fair mistress of that establishment alone.

Nellie had a very clear knowledge of his reasons in so frequently boring her with his vacuous company and vapid remarks, and had shown considerable ingenuity in staving off 'the evil day'; but at last the bore became intolerable, and even her father (who was usually now so absorbed in his business as to take but little notice of what else was going on around him) remarked to Nellie that 'he supposed that young Denton puppy was fooling about after her, and he wished she would send him away with his tail between his legs;' while Jack, on the few occasions when he honoured Heathfield with his presence at dinner, made the rest of the evening hideous to his sister with his chaff as to

‘when it was to be,’ and ‘what she was going to do for her poor brother when she became a millionairess.’ And so Nellie resolved, as the best way of putting a stop to the nuisance, to let the young man have his say, and to give him such a lesson as should effectually rid her of his distasteful addresses.

The next time he called she was alone, and when Mr. Henry Denton’s name was brought up by Hudson (who was under considerable pecuniary obligations to that gentleman) she desired that the visitor should be shown into the drawing-room, and, with a sigh of infinite disgust, ‘prepared to receive cavalry.’

Joy beamed from the pallid countenance of the attenuated one, as he beheld his mistress appear before him alone, and saw the butler close the door behind her. Now! now! was the longed-for chance, and having rehearsed the scene (with carefully locked doors) in his ‘study’ at No.

751, he was prepared to go through his performance at a moment's notice; and, scarcely pausing to go through the customary greetings, he began,

‘You must have seen, Miss Armer, the devotion—the—the—ah—love——’

But ‘Miss Armer’ was not going to let him exhaust the reservoirs of his eloquence, and very cruelly turned it off at the main, almost before even it began to flow.

‘Now, Mr. Denton,’ she said, ‘I know what you are going to say, and you had really better not say it. If I had given you any, the very *least*, encouragement, I could have pardoned you, nay, been grateful to you for thinking so highly of me, as you, no doubt, imagine you do think. But I have *not*. I have constantly and consistently avoided you. I have let you see in every possible way a girl could that I do not like, that I *detest* your—your attentions, your persecutions. I would have been kind to you, and have

spared you this, if you only had let me; but I knew it was no use. Nothing but the very plainest words will convince you that your persecution is abominable to me. I beg of you to take this as a final answer, and for the future to cease this—this absurd infatuation.'

And, with these words, Miss Nellie walked up to the bell, rang it, and, bowing to the dumb-stricken Henry, she passed from the room, with head erect and quivering with anger.

Poor Henry had no time to recover his lost gift of speech, for Hudson promptly appeared at the call of the bell; and there was nothing to be done but to follow that observant individual to the front-door, and to make his exit with what measure of insouciance he could call to his assistance.

Never, surely, was man more dumb-founded than was Henry Denton. That Nellie would refuse him, he had regarded as a possibility of the very remotest; just

possible enough, in fact, to give him the very slightest thrill at the idea; and so to lend a faint savour of uncertainty to his courtship, and to take away the flat staleness of an altogether foregone conclusion; but that she should refuse him in such unequivocal terms of contempt, with a rejection so *supremely* contemptuous, was a consummation utterly outside his very wildest dreamings. He felt it the more, too, on account of the open adulation and the almost outspoken courting which his reputation for wealth had gained him, and that, too, in quarters very far removed from that of the daughter of John Armer, stockbroker.

At first he was consumed with anger at the reproaches the fair Helen had hurled at his devoted head; but, as he walked on and on through the dirty and squalid streets (with which his former life as a solicitor's clerk in Bedford Row had given him an intimate acquaintance),

and almost unconsciously towards the West End, he relapsed into more than his former melancholy, as he thought of his disappointment. The sedentary life he led, begun in indolence, and with an affectation of being aloof from the 'common herd,' had ended in a positive dislike to society; and the pretended melancholy—which was to cast a halo of romance around a very ordinary, everyday young man—had resulted in a dullness of mind, and a disinclination to all exertion, from which his sudden passion for Nellie had roused him.

He soon sank back into his old indifference and laziness, and, being reduced to a very flabby condition by his disappointment, he was as wax in the hands of that clever and determined moulder, his mother. That lady carried him about from place to place in her various sacrifices at the altar of her god, society, and before the winter season was out her plans for

dear Henry were crowned with the success her strenuous exertions deserved; for, egged on by his mother, who was most vehemently backed up by his sisters, the poor young man, who scarcely had the strength of mind to care what became of him, had proposed in proper form, though in an evidently half-hearted way (for which he afterwards paid severely) to the daughter of a 'poor but honest earl,' a strong-minded young lady, of great experience in the world, and somewhat *passée*. This new 'arrangement' Mrs. Denton had completed without the intervention of the assiduous Charlotte, and a proud woman was his mother when she read, among the 'fashionable marriages,' the account of the marriage of Henry Denton, Esq., and the daughter of the aforesaid poor but honest one.

Lady Edith Denton! There was a savour almost of intoxication in the sound, and in repeating the magic syllables she almost

forgot the mortification of the wedding breakfast; for, alas! that longed-for and festal occasion was marred and rendered bitter to his wife by the presence of her irrepressible husband, and his conduct thereat.

Once or twice during the season he had sought the bosom of his family in Piccadilly; but as he found himself very much in the way, and as he was making experiments in agriculture, and thoroughly happy in the amusing, though scarcely profitable, occupation of 'farming his own land,' he had quickly returned to his furrows. But to the wedding of his only son, of course, he *must* come; and come he did, and vastly did he astonish his new and aristocratic relations at the breakfast which followed upon the heels of the ceremony. His attire his wife had carefully seen to, and there was nothing *outrée* in that, but his speech she could not regulate, and in vain did she beseech him not

to open his lips—in vain ; for, moved with the champagne consumed at an unwonted hour, and overcome as to his feelings by the occasion, he perpetrated a speech which struck the company dumb, not so much by its fluency, which was extraordinary, but by the curious similes with which it was garnished, and the ingenuity in which the letter ‘ h ’ was eliminated wherever it ought to have appeared, and placed in unaccustomed places where it certainly ought *not* to have been by any known rules of spelling or pronunciation.

‘ If she had only known of the dreadful father,’ the Lady Edith remarked to her fond mother, as they held a brief interview before the lovely bride departed with the expectant, and, alas ! still despondent Henry, ‘ she would never have gone through with it.’

‘ Never mind, Edith,’ her mother had said ; ‘ the man is so fearfully rich, and has behaved most handsomely, and you

need scarcely ever see him. Besides, one *expects* these millionaires to be vulgar.'

Thus consoled, her daughter went down to endure the customary showers of rice and slippers, and to begin that course of snubbing and ignoring which was soon to make the husband a more 'blighted being than ever.'

The dreary winter months, which dragged their slow length along, brought but little of joy or cheerfulness to our heroine. Nellie had many lonely days in which to ruminate over past sorrows and present anxieties. She missed her old pleasant occupations at her much-regretted home far-off Devon: the rides and drives, and the long tramps with Jack; the 'runs over' to the rectory, and pleasant chats with Mrs. Bolland; her frequent visits to her old pensioners in the parish, and the gossipings with the homely wives of the farming folk. *There*, 'Miss Nellie' was

a person of great importance, the centre round which circulated an atmosphere of kindliness and affection, the squire's daughter; but here in Hampstead she was 'nobody,' the daughter of those 'new people' at Heathfield, stockbrokers or 'something in the City.'

Two sets at least go to make up the sum-total of society at Hampstead; first and foremost the high and mighty clique devoted, as to their business interests, to operations in money, beer, and wine, and taking their diversion somewhat sadly in the form of solemn dinner-parties, and the still more 'painful pleasure' of the drawing-room missionary meeting—a most alarming product of modern evangelicalism—where the last missionary lion relates his harrowing experiences to an audience mostly consisting of ladies in sober, but rich and elaborate evening-dress, and where the finale is not reached

without the accompaniment of the 'chinking' of gold and silver coins upon a salver.

Very exclusive are these monied potentates, and difficult indeed is it for the outsider to break through the hedge of their reserve. With pained looks and pity, largely mixed with grave disapproval, do these first look upon the doings of the next great division, the artistic, the literary, and the dramatic set; for these are tinged with a certain colouring of Bohemianism, and hold views as to the keeping of the Sabbath which cannot but shock their social superiors (?). Attached to both these divisions are flying columns of toadies and hangers-on of the first, and admirers and imitators of the second.

Banks, Beer, and Wine entirely ignored the existence of the Armer family, and but few of the Hampstead folk of any sort or condition called upon our friends at Heathfield: while during their long

residence at Coombridge almost all their old London friends had gone away or died out; so that, saving an occasional visit from some Devonshire friend whom business or pleasure called 'up to London,' and whose visits Nellie regarded with anything but delight, because of the gossip about her and Lord Limborne, Nellie lived almost entirely alone for the greater part of every day. She had, then, plenty of time to think over her affairs, and many painful hours did she pass regretting the happiness that might have been hers with the faithful James. Her father, too, was a new and serious cause of anxiety. He had 'never been the same man' since their final migration from Coombridge; he seemed dull and moody, his temper was more fitful and violent than ever; the least trifle awry was enough to send him into painful exhibitions of anger, and, as time wore on, he only became worse and worse. He looked ill, too, and was thin

and worn ; but, though Nellie ventured once or twice to ask her father what it was that was changing him, he became so angry, even with *her*, at her questions, that she soon gave it up, and only hoped that better times would come. Neither was Jack any comfort to her, for that young gentleman was very quick to perceive and resent the general gloominess of things at Heathfield, and sought a relief from the monotony of his detested office life in the society of certain ‘gilded youth,’ old friends of his at college : some going through the arduous process of ‘eating their dinners,’ and cramming for the Bar ; and others, upon whom Fortune had smiled, and who were not under the unpleasant necessity of ‘doing anything,’ doing *nothing* in the more or less pernicious amusements of the Modern Babylon. The society of these somewhat ‘fast’ individuals required an expenditure of capital which the ample allowance his father made

him did not suffice to meet; and Master Jack was up to his neck in money difficulties again. Of this fact Nellie was made unpleasantly aware at Christmas time, for her brother's tradesmen took that festive opportunity to 'send in bills,' and great was the horror of that young man, as he added up the lengthy column and came to the total, and saw how he had been 'going it.' Some of the 'little accounts' were new ones, and could and must wait, but others were old almost to mustiness, relics of that 'clean slate' whose score is seldom *fully* disclosed to the irate parent. Jack was in despair, and, as was his custom when in that uncomfortable condition, he poured out his griefs and his fears to his sister.

'Nellie,' he said, early in the new year, 'I wish you would come into the smoking-room after dinner; I want to speak to you.'

'Very well, Jack,' said his sister, with

a painful prevision as to what was coming.

She was not left long in suspense, for her extravagant brother opened his budget at once.

‘I am frightfully hard up, Nellie,’ he said, as soon as they were alone, ‘and the governor is so cross and queer I don’t like to speak to him. I wish you would help me.’

‘Is it very much, Jack?’ she asked, in fear and trembling.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘it *is* a good deal; but a man can’t live in London for nothing, it ain’t like Coombridge, you know.’

‘It’s no use speaking to you, Jack,’ said Nellie, wearily; ‘only I think you *might* try and spare me and father these continual worries. I hardly dare to speak to him on such a subject, he has been so strange lately, and I feel sure he will be fearfully angry. I cannot make out what it is that has changed him like this.’

‘Things have not been altogether bright at the office,’ said Jack. ‘I know he has dropped a great deal lately, but it is only a slice of bad luck, and he’ll pull round all right again. But it *is* a nuisance bothering him just now ; and I think, on the whole, I had better speak to him myself, for he is sure to “let out,” and it’s mean to drag you into the row, Nellie.’

‘For heaven’s sake, don’t do anything of the sort, Jack,’ said his sister, who knew more of her father’s present state than the careless and unobservant Jack. ‘I’ll wait until I find him in a good humour, and then speak ; you must get me a list, and tell me how much you want.’

‘You’re a regular angel, Nellie,’ said her graceless brother, ‘and I feel horrid mean to have to put you in such a hole. It must be done soon, too, for some of those fellows won’t wait any longer ;’ and Master Jack went to get his list and his sum total, very well content to have got out of

it so far, so easily, for his easy good-nature was rapidly leading him on from self-indulgence to a very unpleasant form of selfishness.

Great was the ire of Mr. Armer at this new disclosure of his son's inveterate extravagance, and great, too, were Nellie's difficulties in keeping the peace between her father and brother. Mr. Armer 'forked out,' as his son expressed it, but he refused to have anything to say to that son on the matter, merely desiring Nellie to inform Jack, that this was indeed the very last of 'last times,' and that, if Jack got into debt again, he must get out of it the best way he could, for not a stiver would his father pay for him again. His intercourse with the 'offending party' was of the briefest and most monosyllabic description, and things at Heathfield became drearier and drearier after this last fiasco. And so the weeks of the New Year wore on, and brought very little of brightness

or happiness to Nellie; until she gradually got into a hopeless frame of mind, seeing nothing in the future but the monotonous passage of day after day passed in the same dull round, and to the tune of the old regrets and the new anxieties. News of the social success of the Dentons she learnt from the paragraphs of the society papers, where the great doings of No. 751, and the presence of the millionaire's wife and children at the various 'high jinks' of the *haute monde*, were daily chronicled, and where the exalted alliance the Denton family made in the marriage of her quondam persecutor was duly read by the old object of his fatuous adoration. The name of Lord Limborne, too, not infrequently occurred, and Nellie looked with the greatest interest at the bald and brief record of his doings, reading, too, his various utterances in the Lords, and the articles signed by his name, which from time to time appeared in the reviews. On the day of

Henry Denton's immolation at the shrine of the family's glory and honour, Jack came home full of the news, and with two other items to enlarge upon, which were not such pleasant hearing for his sister.

'Did you read the gorgeous Denton wedding, Nellie?' he asked, as he came into the drawing-room where Nellie was sitting before dinner. 'I've brought home the "fashionable rag" with a full, true, and particular account for your refection.'

'I saw something about it in the "fashionable marriages" this morning,' said Nellie. 'Mrs. Denton must be a happy woman; it only needs for Theresa and Emily to join the ranks of the aristocracy to fill up the cup of her joy.'

'Well,' said Jack, 'she won't have long to wait in the case of the lovely Theresa, for they were all talking at the club last night of the luck of the favoured young man. Who do you think he is, Nellie?'

‘Not moving in those exalted regions, I cannot say,’ said Nellie, carelessly.

‘Prepare to receive a dreadful blow,’ said her unfeeling brother; ‘for Miss Theresa Denton is about to be led to the hymeneal altar by no less a person than the Right Honourable the Lord Limborne.’

‘Nonsense, Jack,’ said Nellie, composedly, thinking he was ‘chaffing’ her, as usual.

‘Well, all our fellows were talking about it. They are always about together, they say; and, if Limborne only had money, there’s no knowing where he might get to. But I have another piece of news for you. Poor old Gidley is very ill. Something in his lungs. He is ordered to the South. Some weeks ago he had to give up his business, and now he has shut up his house, and gone off to Nice or Pau, or one of those places.’

‘Oh! why did you not tell me this before, Jack?’ said Nellie. ‘Poor, lonely old man! how miserable he must be, with no one to look after him. If I had only known, I would have gone to see him; he was always so good to me.’

‘I forgot all about it,’ said Jack; ‘and, besides, father would have been frightfully angry if you *had* gone. He hates Gidley like poison;’ and Jack, whistling softly to himself, went up to dress for dinner, leaving his sister with two new subjects for melancholy reflection.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER MATRIMONIAL 'ARRANGEMENT.'

NELLIE might have spared herself the pangs her lover's easy forgetfulness (as shown in Jack's 'news') gave her; for that lover had not the slightest desire, or even thought, of purchasing some of the Denton millions with the blue blood and the ancient title of Limborne, and would have been excessively astonished, not to say disgusted, if he could have heard the way in which his name was banded about together with the name of Theresa Denton. Lord Limborne, who was remarkably steadfast both in his likes and

his dislikes, had not forgotten his little sweetheart, and was not in the least degree likely to forget her, indeed.

It seemed a very hopeless affair at present, and it would take a considerable space of time for his mother's obstinate opposition to die out, and for the memory of her insulting letter to be 'consigned to oblivion.' Lady Limborne was a most obstinate woman, but she adored her son; and that crafty individual foresaw that in time she must give way. Until that time was come he would not go near his Devonshire home. He forgot, however, the fact that the railway companies afforded a like facility of travelling to his mother as to himself; and he was much disturbed at hearing from her that having received a pressing invitation from one of her exalted relatives (Lady Leveret, to wit), and feeling somewhat dull in her loneliness, she had determined to accept the invitation, and would be glad if her son would meet her

at the London terminus on such a day and at such a time.

Their communications had been of the briefest—chiefly, in fact, relating to matters of business—and Lady Limborne had given no sign, as yet, of descending from the heights of resentment, where she seemed disposed to dwell; but her son, who knew very well how she detested leaving her home in the winter, saw, in this new move of hers, a certain shadow of relenting which he hailed with delight.

He had sought to get rid of all unhappy thoughts in the press of earnest application to his official and parliamentary duties, and to think only of the future which he would compel to his will and wish; but the sad and tearful face of Nellie, as he saw her when last he parted from her, haunted him, and he was more and more eager to change her tears to smiles, as time went on.

No such thoughts of relenting, however, actuated his mother in her determination

to seek the 'field of action.' The letter which contained the invitation to London, contained also a long statement as to the desirability of this move on Lady Limborne's part. The letter came from no less a personage than Lady Leveret herself, and was written at the prompting of that lady's husband, who was a near connection of the Limborne family, and who also wrote a few pregnant lines to the same effect. At first Lord Leveret's surprise at his exclusive wife's *penchant* for the Dentons was not unmingled with disgust, but when he found that, once committed to the Denton *avatar*, his wife became eager to make that event a full and finished success, he hailed with delight an employment which engrossed his not too-steady wife, and, as he said, 'kept her out of mischief.'

Pondering over these matters one evening over a post-prandial cigar, after a solitary dinner at his club, a bright inspiration

dawned upon him. The poverty of the Limbornes had often been a subject of conversation in the bosom of the various families to which that lofty but necessitous house was allied, and the fact that the representative of the ancient barony of Limborne must 'marry money' was acknowledged on all hands. Where could he find a better opportunity to ensure this 'consummation devoutly to be wished' than in this 'new freak' (as *he* thought it) which had brought his lovely and proud wife into near relations with these people who were reported to be 'absolutely *made* of money?' Dozens of greedy or necessitous persons were doubtless stretching out eager hands to gain the prize, but it would be Limborne's own fault if he did not take the extra chances his cousin's intimacy with the 'parties concerned' gave him, and carry it off in triumph before them all. Besides, now he came to think of it, Lord

Leveret *had* heard some rumours or other about one of those Denton girls and his cousin Limborne.

Nothing could be better! and, determined to strike while the iron was hot, he (contrary to his use and wont) proceeded home incontinent to seek an interview with that fashionable goddess, his wife. Now Lady Leveret, as he well knew, was suffering from a 'migraine,' caused by a too-violent pursuit of amusement (?), and the refulgent beams which were wont to illuminate only the most exclusive of *salons* were confined at that present moment to her boudoir, where she was recovering from past exertions in the chase of phantom fashion, and gathering strength for fresh efforts in the near future.

'This is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure,' she said, with some trepidation, as, heralded by her discreet abigail, Lord Leveret entered the room; for she was cudgelling her brains as to which of her latest mis-

demeanours was to form the subject-matter of the conjugal lecture she looked for.

'If you were oftener at home, Constance, you would not be able to say that,' said her husband, who would, in fact, have been better pleased if there had been more of 'home,' and less of 'society,' in his wife's mind. 'But I am not going to speak about that,' he added. 'I have been thinking about Limborne and these Dentons.'

'About Lord Limborne?' interrupted his wife, greatly relieved, and at the same time somewhat surprised. 'Why, what has Lord?'

'Wait one moment, and I will explain,' answered Lord Leveret. 'What has Lord Limborne to do with these new friends of yours? that was what your question was to have been, I think. Well! cannot you see the answer?'

'Oh! you mean all this talk about your cousin and the eldest daughter; I assure you there is nothing in it at all. I have

watched them, and though she is more than willing, I feel quite sure that Lord Limborne never gave the girl a single thought.'

'But I intend him to give her a great many thoughts,' said Lord Leveret, with a smile. 'Don't you see what a good thing it would be for Limborne, and through him for us all; if he only had money, there is no knowing what he might not do, and where could he get money easier?'

'The *girl* is ready enough, certainly, and the mother would give one of her eyes to see her daughter Lady Limborne; but you will have difficulty with your cousin; there is some story of some one else, and I am sure he is quiet and preoccupied enough for any amount of "blighted hopes." And, even if you *could* persuade James, you never would get Lady Limborne to consent to such a match; you know how she hates those sort of marriages, and she can and

will make it very uncomfortable if she chooses.'

'Lady Limborne thinks a great deal of what I say,' said Lord Leveret, 'and I think I can put it in such a way as to smooth matters over. I want you to ask her here, and, if you will write a note to her now, I will put in a word which I think will persuade her to come; if we get her to look at this affair in the same way as we do, I expect we shall not have much difficulty in arranging it.'

Without actually mentioning any names, Lord Leveret said enough to make Lady Limborne imagine that 'some one else,' and that a very desirable some one else, had taken the place of the fair Helen in her son's heart; and though she was not a little astonished at a fickleness on his part for which she did not give him credit, yet the wish jumped with the fact, and she was only too glad to hail a report which, if

true, would relieve her of all the anxieties about Nellie which her son's 'obstinacy' had caused her. Hence when he met her at the station, and conducting her to Lord Leveret's carriage, which was in attendance, sat beside her as they drove to that nobleman's dwelling, she was kindness itself, and strove, by the display of an affection which she really felt, to efface in Lord Limborne's mind all the unpleasantness of the past. Not a word was said about the Armer embroglio, and Lord Limborne on his part hailed with joy the kind words of his mother, looking upon her dulcet mood as upon a sign that she was relenting, and that *one* of the obstacles to the happy end of his love-story was rapidly melting away. During the whole of the evening, which was devoted to a family dinner-party, the farce was kept up, and it was not until the guests, including her son, were departed that Lord Leveret's plans were unfolded to the mother of the

'chief party concerned.' Great was her astonishment at hearing that it was to one of 'those horrible Wreford people' that her son was to be united. *Some* rumours of their social success she had heard, but it took a great deal of persuasion upon the part of Lord Leveret to make her even hear of such a thing.

'I always hoped he would marry Emily Beldon,' she said.

'It is no use thinking of *that*, Lady Limborne,' said Lady Leveret; 'for Emily Beldon is already engaged. She is going to marry that red-haired little son of the Duke of ——' (naming a mighty Scottish potentate.) 'She looks like his mother; he is so absurdly boyish-looking.'

'I *cannot* think how James could let such a prize escape him,' said his mother, in bitter disappointment. 'I am quite certain the Beldons would have made no opposition; indeed, Lady Beldon seemed

quite to wish it. It is a grievous disappointment to me.'

It was then that Lord Leveret played his trump card.

'My dear cousin,' he said, 'you know the old consolatory proverb anent the good fish that are still left in the sea. Constance here has a very good fish indeed, only waiting to rise to the fly. A lovely girl—shrewd—a great success in the world, and rich "beyond the dreams of avarice."' "

'Who, pray, is this paragon?' said Lady Limborne, pretending to treat the matter as a joke, but really very much in earnest.

'Why! cannot you guess?' put in Lady Leveret. 'It is the daughter of one of your neighbours, my friend Theresa Denton.'

'Theresa Denton!' gasped Lady Limborne. '*Your* friend! You must be jesting!'

'Not in the least, I assure you,' said Lady Leveret. 'It is, indeed, Theresa

Denton Lord Leveret is thinking of, and she *is* my friend.'

'Why, they are roturiers—vulgar; the father is *quite* impossible—people hardly know them about us,' exclaimed Lady Limborne.

'Everybody knows them *here*,' said Lady Leveret. 'They are the smartest of the smart, and most enormously rich.'

'Yes,' joined in her husband. 'One pardons everything to money now-a-days. Do not be angry with us, Lady Limborne, but you live in an old world. It is all different now. It is absolutely necessary for James to marry a fortune; and here is a most excellent opportunity, and it would be worse than foolish to reject it. I do hope you will not oppose this,' he added, tentatively.

'I must think about it all,' said Lady Limborne. 'I am too much astonished to say anything now, and too tired also, dear,' she added, turning to Lady Leveret,

and kissing her; 'so you must let me go to my rooms now, and we will talk about it to-morrow;' and, saying good-night to her host and hostess, she retired.

The matter did not require much thought on Lady Limborne's part, and nothing but the respect she had for Lord Leveret's opinion, and the courtesy she owed to her host, prevented her from speaking her mind very plainly on the subject. A conversation which she had with her son on the morrow, however, materially altered her views.

She was trying next morning to frame some sentence in which to refuse the 'monstrous' proposition without giving undue annoyance to Lord and Lady Leveret, when her son was announced. His mother was quite unaware of the way in which Lord Limborne's name had been coupled with that of Theresa Denton, and she was the very last person in the world to put such an idea into his head; she,

therefore, preserved a judicious silence as to the topic of her last night's conversation. Quite another person from the lovely Theresa occupied the thoughts of Lord Limborne, and so eager was he to have his hopes as to his mother's 'giving way' made certainties that he began on the subject almost before the customary morning's greetings were over.

'You cannot think, mother,' he said, sitting down by her side and holding her hand in his, 'what a relief it is to see you again. I do hope now that all this . . . this estrangement is over; it is all so unnatural between you and me.'

'My dear James,' replied his mother, 'I am sure you cannot have suffered from it as *I* have suffered, for you have had many things to distract your thoughts, many hopes, and many ambitions, and I have nothing and nobody to think about and care for but you. I did not wish to allude to the subject, but I must tell you how

happy it makes me to feel that you have, at last, seen how right I was about that unhappy attachment of yours. I can only regret that you did not come to your senses before, for I have just heard that Emily Beldon is lost to you, and it will be difficult, indeed, to find anyone so fitted in every way to be your wife.'

Lord Limborne was speechless with astonishment while his mother complacently proceeded towards the end of her sentences. He was deeply disappointed to find how mistaken he had been, and how foolishly he had been misled by his mother's kind manner of yesterday. Nothing would induce him to go again through the unseemly scenes which usually followed the introduction of Nellie's name; but it was absolutely necessary to disabuse his mother of the mistake she was labouring under, and how to do this without giving her mortal offence was a problem very difficult of solution.

‘Well, James, have you nothing to say to me?’ said Lady Limborne, becoming a little uneasy at his silence, and thinking that something had been said to him about Theresa Denton, and that he was hesitating as to how he should open a subject he knew would be distasteful to her.

‘I think it is better to speak plainly after all,’ said Lord Limborne, answering his thoughts and speaking more to himself than to his mother. ‘Mother,’ he went on, rising and walking a step or two from her, ‘you must own that *I* have not begun this subject. I did not wish to speak on the matter, but you have forced it on me, and I *must* tell you now, once and for ever, that I shall never change in my feelings and intentions towards Helen Armer. I hoped from your manner yesterday that you were tired of opposing my wishes and my happiness, and I am bitterly disappointed to find how mistaken I am.’

Now, if, as he said, Lord Limborne was

bitterly disappointed, so also was his mother, who, as we know, had seen in his natural pleasure in seeing her, and his cordial affection at her supposed relenting in her opposition to his dearest wish, a giving way on his part, which was as foreign to him, as to her. She felt, however, that she *could* not go back to the old terms of estrangement; and, whilst her son was speaking, she made up her mind to resist the impulse to upbraid him, and to try to keep on something like terms of affection with her only child.

‘I cannot deny, James,’ she said at length, ‘that I, too, am grievously disappointed, but I frankly tell you I *cannot* do without your love; and as, I fear, we shall never agree upon this subject, let us make up our minds never to speak of it. I am sure you will agree with me that this is the best thing that can be done. And now, James, you must leave me, for Lady Leveret is going to drive me

out; and, as we are going shopping, I don't suppose you will care to join us.'

'I could not, if I would,' answered her son; 'for I have stolen from the time which the country pays for to be with you now. I am coming in to lunch to-morrow, and then we can make up our plans. I have much to tell you, and ask you about!' and, kissing her, he bade farewell, and hastened away to his work, glad to find that the breach was so far healed, and hoping even yet to win over his mother to agree in, if not to favour, his wishes.

Whilst Lady Limborne was, with the assistance of her maid, going through the arduous process of 'putting on her things,' she determined to alter her tactics as regards her opposition to Lord and Lady Leveret's proposed Denton-Limborne alliance. The constant brooding over one subject for the last two or three months had left a residuum of very pronounced hatred towards the inoffensive Nellie, upon

whose fair shoulders she laid the whole weighty burden of her estrangement from her son. And, as anything would be better than that she should be presented with that young lady as a daughter-in law, she determined to go heart and soul with the Leverets, and to try, with their powerful help, to bring about the marriage they proposed.

Even now she would not own to herself that her power over her son was gone. Until this 'unfortunate entanglement,' he had been as wax in her hands, and she still hoped to get him 'out of the toils.'

That very afternoon, Lady Leveret was to lunch at No. 751 ; and, finding Lady Limborne in so amiable a frame of mind, she 'took the liberty' of bringing her guest with her, greatly to Mrs. and the Misses Dentons' astonishment and delight.

When one has once made up one's mind, it is of no use to look at the black side

of the cloud; and, before the visit was over, Lady Limborne had formed quite a different opinion of her Wreford neighbours. The Dentons were very quick at catching the tone of their new surroundings; and it would have required a less partial critic than they met with in Lady Limborne, under her new 'change of position,' to discover much difference between them and the two or three very fashionable ladies indeed who 'assisted' at the entertainment. And, as for Theresa, that extremely sharp young lady was far too astute to display for the benefit of the proud and reserved Lady Limborne those conspicuous arts which had already gained her quite a front place in the ranks of the 'chic.'

The art with which she sought to be entered upon the 'good books' of the lady she desired to call by the sometimes opprobrious epithet of mother-in-law, astonished even her mother and her sis-

ter. And, sooth to say, Lady Limborne herself found something extremely pleasant in the deference with which this very wealthy young person treated her; with the attention the crafty Theresa paid to her remarks, and the 'very correct' ideas which fell from Theresa's lips as to 'men and things.' It was also a revelation to Lady Limborne to find the Dentons so firmly established in such exalted regions, and altogether she was not long in coming to the conclusion that her son 'might do a great deal worse,' and, at length, she was quite ready to fall in with the Leverets' plans in this matter.

CHAPTER IX.

MISFORTUNES 'IN BATTALIONS.'

Now the remarks which had fallen from her brother Jack's lips in regard to an alliance between the families of Limborne and Denton, Nellie had, at first, received with a scornful, though silent, disbelief; but as time went on, and the unpleasant subject forced itself upon her thoughts, she began to doubt whether there might not be some truth in the story after all, for though she *did* remember as he had told her on their last parting, and in such sad and solemn accents, to 'remember that he would never give her up,' she

knew very well that under the stress of such excitement promises were not seldom made which were, alas ! as likely to be broken as the proverbial pie-crust. It was a long time (in Nellie's eyes) since that painful interview, and she had seen nothing of her lover since that day—although once or twice she had thought to have caught a glimpse of him in her walks abroad. (For, in truth, Lord Limborne was not always able to resist the impulse which often drew him Hampsteadwards, and had several times seen the fair form of his beloved, and once or twice had narrowly escaped detection.) It was an utterly hopeless affair, so she had argued with herself, she had made that very plain to her quondam lover at the interview before-named ; he was resigned to the inevitable, and what could be better for him than that he should strive to forget her in the affection of 'another,' and Nellie felt she hated that 'another,'—to wit, the handsome daughter

of the wealthy owner of Wreford—with a very righteous hatred. This feeling, extremely wrong as doubtless it was, did not lose in its intensity, when one day some fortnight after Lady Limborne's advent in London, Nellie, whilst she was leaving a shop in Regent Street, and looking for her brougham, perceived the beauteous Theresa (wrapped up in the most becoming of fur cloaks, and positively beaming with happiness) in a barouche, and actually seated beside no less a person than Lady Limborne!

Here then was a confirmation with a vengeance to all her fears, and, if any more confirmation were wanted, she had it some two months later, when, under very different circumstances than the present, she read in a society journal, which Jack had picked up in the train, and brought home for her diversion, that 'a marriage was arranged between Lord Limborne and a daughter of the well-

known millionaire, Mr. Denton, of Wrexford, in the county of Devon, and 751, Piccadilly.' And thus it was that Nellie Armer's love-dream came to naught, and the last lingering hope fled away, and left her miserable and forlorn indeed.

But even darker clouds than these were hovering over our heroine, and it was not long before they gathered together in serried masses and the storm broke.

Mr. Armer was becoming more and more moody and preoccupied; he would scarcely respond to the affection with which Nellie tried to soothe his too evident irritability; he scarcely seemed to notice her, and was so absent and absorbed in thought that many times he never answered her efforts to talk with him, and did not appear even to know that anyone was addressing him. Even the careless Jack seemed touched with the same preoccupation, and there was, in fact, an air of expectancy and waiting for some horrible

evil, that Nellie could bear no longer. Jack seemed determined to avoid her, and for some days she could not find an opportunity to speak to him alone ; but at last she caught him one evening dolefully smoking a cigar in the smoking-room, and gazing abstractedly into the fire.

‘ Jack,’ she said ; and as her brother started up she shut the door and turning the key took it from the lock, and came up to him ; ‘ Jack, I must and will know what all this means ; it is not fair that I should be kept in ignorance like this.’

‘ What *do* you mean, Nellie?’ said Jack, moving a chair for her by the fireside. ‘ Why these airs of tragedy, this King Cambyzes’ vein, the locked door, mysteries of Udolpho, and all that sort of thing ;’ and Jack tried to laugh off the question, not, however, very successfully, for he could not deceive his sister, and she saw he was pretending an insouciance he was far from feeling.

‘What is the use of keeping things from me, Jack?’ she went on, taking no notice of his forced badinage. ‘If anything is wrong, surely I ought to know it, and that there *is* something wrong, I am certain, else why is father so dull and so gloomy, and why are even you so anxious looking?’

‘Well,’ said Jack, ‘if you *will* have it, you must, and, after all, it won’t be long before you *must* know. I should have told you before, only I promised father to keep it from you as long as possible;’ and Jack paused as if seeking how to break the news.

‘I think I know something of it, Jack,’ said Nellie; ‘you said, when I spoke to father about your money troubles, that things were not looking quite so bright in father’s business’

‘Yes,’ interrupted Jack, not sorry to have some one to whom he could pour out

his woes and anxieties, 'that is where it is. I remember I said I hoped the trouble would soon be tided over, but things have only been going from bad to worse since then, and I begin to fear it will end in a burst up.'

'Oh! Jack,' said Nellie, 'it cannot be so bad as that! surely you exaggerate; but it must be terrible for poor father, no wonder he is so strange.'

'I don't exaggerate in the least, Nellie,' said her brother; 'things must have come to a bad pass for father to confide in *me*, and two or three days ago, as we were driving down to the City together, he told me he could not bear it much longer, and that, as his son, I ought to be told what a position he was in. He made me promise not to tell you, and you must not let him see you know anything; after all, you *must* have found it out sooner or later. Poor old dad! he was in a terrible way.'

‘I cannot understand it at all, Jack,’ said Nellie; ‘why, it seems only the other day that he was speaking of giving up all this business again, and going back to Coombridge.’

‘Ah!’ said Jack, ‘he will never go *there* again. Coombridge went months ago; everything he has touched has seemed to fail. I don’t know how it is, but he has been throwing good money after bad, and now, unless something little short of a miracle happens, we shall have to give up; he can’t hold on much longer. What on earth is to become of us all, is more than *I* can tell.’

‘It *can’t* be so bad as that, Jack,’ said Nellie. ‘Why don’t we give up the carriage and change into a smaller house, if we are so poor?’

‘You don’t understand, Nellie,’ said Jack; ‘*that* would not make any difference. From what father said to me, it is too late for anything of that sort; he couldn’t call

in his money now, he has been speculating, and it is "touch and go" as to whether he pulls through or not.'

'Oh! poor father, poor father,' said Nellie. 'Why did he quarrel with Mr. Gidley? we were so happy at dear old Coombridge.'

'Well, old lady,' said Jack, 'it is no use crying over spilt milk, and, after all, there is just a chance that things may right themselves;' and wishing his visitor good-night Jack went off to bed in anything but a cheerful frame of mind, for, though he pretended to see a chance in order to soothe Nellie, he felt too certain that his father's ruin was only a matter of time.

The poor old squire was indeed fallen upon evil times; in red hot anger with the sarcastic Gidley, and anxious to show that, once out of his leading strings, his acuteness and knowledge of matters financial would soon yield him the fruit of an enormous fortune, he plunged into specu-

lations from which his careful partner would have warned him. At first he was successful even beyond his dreams, and, about the time of his farewell visit to his Devonshire home, he was adding to his wealth in a marvellous way, and consequently jubilant at his release from Gidley's restraints, and much puffed up as to his superior sharpness.

Want of 'dash,' a quality Mr. Gidley was remarkably deficient in, was, the squire argued to himself, the only thing which had prevented the firm of Armer and Gidley from taking their place among the princes of finance; as for him, he would not be content with the very respectable position that firm had held, but he would soon show Gidley what a fool he was to go on laboriously slaving away in the same old ruts, when he might climb to heights quite undreamed of by that steady-going man of business. But the luck, which proverbially attends the first risks of the

gambler, soon deserted Mr. Armer, and week after week saw him more and more deeply engaged in risky affairs, and less and less able to extricate himself; his frantic struggles to escape, only brought him into still deeper waters, until it became a mere 'toss up' as to whether he should be utterly overwhelmed, or escape as by a miracle, a sadder and a wiser man. In a few short days he would have to meet engagements of a very serious nature; already whispers as to 'Armer's shakiness' were abroad; and unless a mining company in which he was largely interested, and which was in the meantime to be 'floated,' proved a success, and caused the pockets of a confiding public to open very widely, Mr. Armer would be totally unable to 'meet those engagements,' and must 'go to the wall.'

He was, naturally, strung up to a high pitch of nervous excitement; he could neither eat nor sleep, and the severe strain

was gradually sapping the foundations of his health. No wonder then that Nellie found him strange, moody, and pre-occupied.

At last the end came, and the poor old squire returned home one fatal evening a broken and a ruined man.

He seemed to be in a dazed state, and scarcely spoke during dinner; it was a dismal enough meal, for Jack knew the end was come, and Nellie only too easily guessed the truth from her father's and brother's manner. After dinner Mr. Armer went immediately into his study, and Jack had an opportunity to tell his sister the dreaded news. As he was rapidly informing Nellie of the catastrophe, Mr. Armer's bell rang sharply, and Hudson soon after came into the dining-room, where Jack and Nellie had been sitting with the untouched dessert before them, with a message from their father that 'Master wished to see them in the study.'

They found Mr. Armer seated at his escritoire; the writing-table was covered with a litter of papers; he tried to rise as they came in, but he had not the strength, and sank back again in his chair. Nellie ran up to him, and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed him, and Jack came and stood by his side.

‘Nellie dear,’ said her father, and his voice sounded thick and strange, ‘I meant it all for the best . . . I did not think . . .’

‘Oh! father,’ cried Nellie, with her face close to his, ‘do not speak like that, I cannot bear it . . . Jack, tell father it does not matter so long as we are together, you and I and he . . .’

As she was speaking, Mr. Armer rose up, and held out his hand as if to grasp his son’s hand; but, before Jack could respond, the squire’s hand dropped to his side, and Mr. Armer fell back in his chair insensible.

The grim enemy that had been watch-

ing for his opportunity day after day had seized upon him at last, and the squire was struck down with apoplexy. For three nights and two days Jack and Nellie watched by their father's bedside; but the squire never spoke again, and in the dark and chill early morning of the third day all was over, and Jack and Nellie were left alone in the world, and almost penniless. It is said that Providence is good to *poor* folk in this matter of sorrow, inasmuch as the dire necessities of common every-day want forces them to work, be their grief never so deep, and so takes away from them that dwelling upon the painful loss which the customary seclusion of the richer people almost *forces* upon them. Small time for this indulgence in the 'luxury of woe' was allowed to Nellie Armer; almost stunned as she was by the suddenness of the blow, she was perforce aroused from the first torpor of her grief by the painful necessity of looking the

future in the face. Most women in her position have all possible trouble taken off their hands at such a sorrowful time; but Nellie had no one to consult save Jack, who seemed absolutely dazed at his father's death, and this sudden overturning of all things. Jack had always depended upon his sister, and, without thinking of the matter, he turned naturally to her for advice and guidance in their terrible trial.

The reading of Mr. Armer's will was a cruel mockery; all his large property he had divided between his son and his daughter—Jack was to have Coombridge, and Nellie an equivalent in money; but, alas! of the money there was not a sou left, and Coombridge had months ago passed out of its old squire's hands; while day after day the bills poured in, for they had been left until poor Mr. Armer's 'grand coup' should come off, and there was little or nothing to meet them with now.

The affair was indeed urgent; already there was an execution in the house, and, before their father had been laid in his grave a fortnight, his children had to prepare for leaving their home. Fortunately the rent had still some two or three months to run on, but the furniture was already advertised, and, before many days were over, would be sold by auction. What to do and where to go were the questions which Jack put to Nellie, and which effectually roused her from the first dumb helplessness of her grief.

Their only relations were far-off cousins, for the squire had been an only son, and his wife's only sister was dead long ago. Nellie was too proud to be dependent upon acquaintances, even if any such had 'come forward.' Her only intimate friends were the Bollands, and though she knew they would gladly receive her, as indeed they offered and even urged their kindness on her, as soon as they heard the

sad news, yet Nellie knew that they already had a hard struggle to make the two ends meet. She could not and would not be a burden on them; besides, if she were to go away from him, who would look after Jack, the only relation left to her? Jack, so easily led away, and so likely to go altogether to the bad in his desperation. No, there was no one she could turn to but her old godfather, Mr. Gidley, and he was far away, his house in Bedford Square sold, and his very existence almost forgotten already. Besides, by his father's death, Jack was thrown out of employment, and he seemed capable of doing nothing but mooning about in a dismally unsettled way, looking the very picture of helplessness and woe.

It soon became a choice between accepting the Bollands' pressing offer until they had time to look around them, or the workhouse, and Nellie was slowly making up her mind to go back to her

old parish, much as her soul rebelled against the painful gossip her return in so sadly changed circumstances would no doubt provoke, when one morning the old cook (who had insisted on staying with her beloved little mistress to 'the very last,' remarking that 'money wasn't no hobject to her, thank 'Evin,') brought in the melancholy morning budget of blue epistles, with 'bill' stamped upon each one of them only too plainly. They were nearly all addressed to Jack, and Nellie did not care to open them until he made his appearance at the breakfast-table.

Jack turned them over listlessly enough, for he could easily guess at the contents, and as he opened one after another, some concerning him and some his dead father, his lengthening face told its old tale of bills, and nothing but bills. As, however, he opened one of the very last, a long strip of paper fell out, and Nellie, as she picked it up, scarcely needed to look at it

to see (for Jack's brightening face told her) that it was something for them, and something good, too.

It was a cheque, and for a very considerable amount, made out to John Armer, and, as the present only bearer of that name read the accompanying note out loud to his sister, she learnt that 'some friends of the late Mr. John Armer on the Stock Exchange, hearing of the sad circumstances of his death, had ventured to send his children a slight token of their respect and liking for their father.' The note also contained a postscript which informed Jack that, if he would call at the writer's office at such-and-such-an-hour of that or the next day, the writer would see what could be done in the way of finding Mr. John Armer some employment. Thus, then, by that sympathetic kindness which, despite the pessimist, seldom fails the unfortunate, was the wolf driven for awhile from Nellie and Jack's door. Jack lost no

time in keeping his appointment, and he returned to his sister that night with the joyful tidings that he was engaged as a clerk at the not-too-magnificent salary of eighty pounds a year, which, small as it was, was a great deal more than Master Jack's services were worth, and was, indeed, bestowed more in the name of charity than of business.

Nellie quickly decided upon her course of action under these new circumstances. The sum of money the kindness of her father's friends had given them was largely eaten into by the demands of her father's and of Jack's tradesmen; the remnant would not last them very long, and Jack's salary would barely suffice for that young man's keep, lodging, and journeys to and from his office; so Nellie decided to take lodgings in some quiet but thickly-populated neighbourhood, and there keep house and home for Jack, and, at the same time, seek to eke out their narrow income by

taking such pupils as she could get. Before long they were settled in decent rooms in a quiet street in Camden Town, rooms which Nellie's clever hands soon made home-like, and to which Jack returned evening after evening with a pleasing regularity, while Nellie was making every effort in her power to bring some little grist to the mill on her own account.

CHAPTER X.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

THE news of Mr. Armer's ruin and death failed to reach one person largely interested in those two sad events. Neither Nellie nor Jack had thought of 'putting' their father's death 'in the papers,' and Lord Limborne, having no interest in funds, or loans, or companies, passed over the (to him) bald items of the money-market, and therefore did not see that 'failure on the Stock Exchange' which affected him so nearly. The stony or bricky outside of a house gives but little sign of the events going on inside that house: 'tis true the

tan-covered roadway tells its sad tale of sickness, and the blank and dismal aspect of a house 'with all its blinds down' announces the death of an inmate, while the gaily-striped awning and the crimson carpet from doorway to kerb speak of festivities toward; there is, too, the depressing aspect of the shuttered, unoccupied house; but domestic tragedies the most horrible may be going on, and ruin may stare the inmates in the face, and the house presents the same accustomed look, and tells no tale of the joys or woes of the inhabitants thereof.

There is, however, one other event in the history of a house which is very plainly shown in its outward presentment, and the wisps of straw, the torn bills, the trampled grass, and the general dirt and discomfort incident to a sale of furniture, or to 'families removing,' gave Heathfield the accustomed forlorn and deserted look, and caused that faithful lover, Lord Limborne, an uncomfortable pang of disap-

pointment, as, one day, shortly after Jack and Nellie's departure 'for good and all,' he rounded the corner of the road in which Heathfield was situated, and came upon the unexpected sight of that house, ordinarily the picture of cleanliness and neatness, in a state of *déshabille*, with the evidences of a sale in all their dirty confusion, and with placards in conspicuous positions, announcing, in the ornate language of the house-agent, the fact that 'that desirable family residence, comprising such and such rooms, etc., and replete with every comfort,' was to be sold or let.

All sorts of conjectures passed through his mind as he drew near, and gazed at the dismal spectacle; but all of them, it may well be imagined, very wide of the truth. 'They had gone back to Coombridge, perhaps, or they had moved into one of the squares, or they had gone further out into the country.' At any

rate, it was evident enough that they had left *that* house, and that it behoved him, Lord Limborne, to find out as best he might whither they had flown. The information which he soon received, in answer to his inquiries, from the obliging proprietor of a bookseller's shop, filled him with the direst consternation.

'The family who lived at Heathfield? Yes. Had not the gentleman heard? A very sad story, indeed, but common enough now-a-days. They were ruined. Speculations on the Stock Exchange, he *had* heard say. The father was dead—died of a broken heart, poor gentleman. There had just been a sale; and the children—a son and a daughter—had left Hampstead. The gentleman could rely upon the truth of what he was telling him, for he had supplied them with newspapers and magazines, and everything had been settled up most honourably. He did not believe they had left a penny of debt in the town. No,

he was sorry to say, he could *not* give the gentleman that information; neither did he know of anyone who was likely to know where the poor souls had gone to.'

Nor could Lord Limborne find *any* tidings of Nellie's whereabouts, though he spent some hours in making inquiries: neither from the house-agent, nor from the various tradesmen to whom he applied, could he find any trace of the Armers. They had come and gone as hundreds of customers had come and gone before, and, as they had paid all their bills, nobody cared one stiver as to where they had gone to, or what had become of them.

As Lord Limborne walked dejectedly down the hill towards the cab-stand, his mind was full of most sorrowful thoughts. That the bookseller's information was true, he could not but believe; for it was echoed at every place where he had inquired, and where anything at all was known of the

late inhabitants of Heathfield. Nellie was, without doubt, fatherless, and almost peniless; and how to find her out in the mazes of the huge modern Babylon was a problem he must set himself to solve. How to begin his quest was the difficulty. It was evident enough that no one could help him at Hampstead. He had absolutely no clue to guide him. For aught he knew, the brother and sister might have been 'taken up' by some relation or friend, and be living hundreds of miles away from London, or they might be living (as, indeed, was the case) near at hand. Find Nellie he must; his heart yearned towards her, and never did he love her more dearly or long for her more intensely than now, when he knew she must be in such sorrow and distress. He knew how closely Nellie had been attached to her father, and he knew the terrible wrench his loss must have been to her; nor could her lover bear to think of his

beautiful Nellie in the griping hand of poverty, and, perhaps, of absolute want. If he could only see her, and take her away from all this wretchedness !

Proud as she was, even if he were to find her, he feared she would make of her changed circumstances only another barrier between them. Still, inaction was impossible, he *must* be doing something towards discovering her, and as he was driven rapidly towards his rooms, and during the evening, and far into the night, he pondered over the difficult subject. He dared not advertise, for Nellie's pride would be up in arms, and she would bitterly resent any attempt on his part to find her out in her altered surroundings. Nothing, of course, could be done until he knew where she had flown to ; if he could only find this out, he could keep some sort of watch over her, and wait until time should give him an opportunity to *make* her change her fixed resolutions. If

he waited on, and still continued faithful to her, she *must* give way at last, for he knew he had a strong advocate in her own heart, and she *could* not refuse in time to make herself and her lover happy.

The next morning he set to work in earnest. He knew of the friendly feelings of Mrs. Bolland towards the old squire's little daughter, and he wrote to her asking for news; he remembered the name of Mr. Armer's old partner and Nellie's godfather, and, easily finding his address in the directory, he wrote, too, to him at Bedford Square. From the same useful source of information he found Mr. Armer's City address, and drove there. But it was all of no use: Mr. Armer's old offices were to let, and the busy clerks in the neighbouring offices knew nothing of the whereabouts of Jack; Mrs. Bolland was as ignorant in the matter, and nearly as anxious for news as himself; and his letter to Mr. Gidley was returned in due

course, for that gentleman was 'not known' to the present owners of his late abode.

At last Lord Limborne determined to call in the aid of the private inquiry offices, and during the next few weeks he disbursed considerable sums of money to one of those expensive institutions; but to no purpose whatever. No trace of the Armers could the astute individual set apart for that 'case' find, and his opinion was that 'the parties had changed their name,' or they might have 'gone abroad.' In fine, after weeks and weeks of anxious search and continual disappointment, Lord Limborne became hopeless, while the anxiety he was going through on Nellie's account began to prey upon his health, and to show such signs in his worried look and hollow cheeks as Lady Limborne did not fail to notice. To all her questions he gave only evasive replies: 'he was rather hard-worked just now,' or

‘there was really nothing the matter, he was a little out of sorts.’ On no account would he afford Lady Limborne the keen satisfaction he felt the cause of his anxiety would yield *her*, for he knew how she would rejoice to find an end to all her anxieties about Nellie in this disappearance, the cause of so much weary trouble to him, so many restless days, so many sleepless nights.

In the meantime the lovely Theresa Denton, and her allies Lady Leveret and (*mirabile dictu*) the mother of the quarry, the proud Lady Limborne, had not been idle. Theresa was quite clever enough to see that the affectation of ‘smartness’—which delighted the new world to which her father’s money, assisted by Charlotte Ingle and the all-powerful Lady Leveret, had given her the entrée—was not at all likely to charm the austere and old-fashioned mother-in-law-elect.

The freedom of speech and boldness of

repartee which entranced the *blasé* gilded youth of the period, Theresa felt would be shocking and offensive to the refined and proud mind of Lady Limborne ; she, therefore, placed a great restraint upon herself when in the presence of that lady, who would, indeed, have been not a little astonished at some of the sayings and doings of a young lady whom she regarded as a clever girl, and, as she remarked to Lady Leveret, ‘just a little too *prononcée* ; but all that will wear off as she becomes accustomed to the proper tone of society.’ Lady Leveret wisely held her tongue, and nodded her acquiescence in the speaker’s sentiments, for she knew a great deal more about the tone of modern society than Lady Limborne, and was quite aware of the fact that Theresa Denton’s somewhat risky words and deeds would be no bar to the social success of that handsome young lady. Theresa’s address had brought about a state of things she had not dared

even to hope for a month or two ago, and Lady Limborne was actually almost as anxious to ally her son to the Denton millions as she had been to place him under the ægis of the Beldon set.

It was pleasant to have some one who agreed in all her lofty ideas about the importance of the ancient houses of Limborne and Hautford, who was willing to pay the most careful attention to somewhat long-winded accounts of the heroes and heroines of those exalted lines, and the various ramifications of the ancient stocks ; studies of surprising intricacy and of a portentous dulness to anyone but the speaker.

However, Theresa could afford to be patient. She saw her reward for all these lengthened discourses on musty subjects very plainly before her, and, when once she had gained this reward, she would have her revenge, and the dowager would have to retire very much into the background ; she had had *her* day, and Theresa

was now going to have *hers*. Lady Leveret was delighted at the success of her scheme, and at the easiness with which Lady Limborne was made to 'accept the position;' she acknowledged frankly the cleverness of Theresa, and prophesied to herself that that young lady would 'go far,' when once the Denton money had furbished up the faded glories of the Limborne coronet.

Every assistance she could give, she gave with a willing mind, and Theresa Denton almost lived at Leveret House; day after day she was with Lady Leveret and Lady Limborne, and frequent were the meetings between the lovely Theresa and the latter lady's son. But, if Theresa had had an easy task in gaining the good will of her mother-in-law-elect, she found it a hard task to make any way with Lord Limborne, and sometimes she was almost inclined to give up the chase, and endow some more appreciative individual with her charms both of purse and person; but

Theresa inherited a fund of persistence from her mother; she was, moreover, piqued at an indifference on Lord Limborne's part, which was a direct contrast to the eager pursuit she would be subjected to, if it became known that the match was 'off.'

The affair was no secret, it was openly talked of, and the only person who knew nothing at all about it was the party most concerned, viz., Lord Limborne himself. That gentleman was too much pre-occupied with dismal forebodings about his beloved Nellie to pay much attention to other sublunary matters. But if 'all the world' was talking of the 'approaching event,' and wondering why it was not openly announced, Theresa Denton was not at all deceived; she had tried every expedient her ingenuity could suggest, she had read all Lord Limborne's articles, pamphlets, and speeches, she had gone deeply into the social questions in which she knew him to

be interested, and had displayed these freshly acquired wares to the very best advantage, and with some success, for Lord Limborne was pleased to have so sympathetic and clever a pupil; but still she was forced to own to herself that she was yet a long way from the goal of her ambition.

Lord Limborne's preoccupation and harassed look Theresa did not fail to mark, and she racked her brains to discover the cause of these signs. She had forgotten all about Nellie, and the most careful watching on her part had failed to discover any symptoms of attentions on Lord Limborne's part which could arouse her fears as to any other rival. What could be the meaning, then, of this marked change in him? His position was assured, his future advancement was certain, he was well spoken of by the leaders of his party, and on every side she heard the most confident predictions as to his future.

The only weak point in his position was want of money, and of this commodity an alliance with her would give him enough and to spare.

Theresa therefore determined to waste no more time, but by hook or by crook to bring about the consummation she so devoutly wished. How to set about the matter was a problem to which she devoted a considerable amount of careful thought. Obviously *she* could do no more than she had already done; she imagined that she had made it plain enough to Lord Limborne that he only had to ask to have; *there* was the river, and the horse was constantly being brought up to it, but the foolish animal obstinately refused to drink.

Theresa could not propose to Lord Limborne, and, as he seemed as far off as ever from taking that decided step as regards herself, things were come to a deadlock, an unpleasant state of affairs which Theresa

felt to be unendurable. She determined, therefore, to make a confidant of Lady Leveret, and through her means to see if something could not be done towards bringing the lagging lover-elect 'up to the scratch.'

The ways of Leveret House were by this time perfectly well-known to Theresa Denton, and she very soon had an opportunity for a confidential confabulation with the lady of that house in her sanctum.

'What *is* the matter with Lord Limborne?' she asked Lady Leveret one afternoon, shortly after she had come to this determination, and as she and Lady Leveret were cosily chatting over the fire in that lady's boudoir. 'He looks ill and worn, and one can scarcely get a word out of him.'

Now Lady Leveret had herself only been waiting an opportunity to hasten on a

climax in the Denton-Limborne affair, of which, to tell the truth, she was beginning to get heartily tired, and Theresa's question was a chance not to be neglected.

'He *does* look worried, and is restless and distraught,' said Lady Leveret. 'Do you know, Theresa,' she added, with a meaning smile, 'I believe my solemn cousin is in love,' (which was, indeed, the case).

'Ah!' said Theresa, 'and who may be the "happy she," I wonder?'

'How can *you* ask such a question?' said Lady Leveret. 'I am sure his attentions to a certain young lady of my acquaintance have been marked enough; both Lord Leveret and Lady Limborne have noticed the fact, and you must have seen it, too. Who is it he always talks to, and what do you talk about in those long confabulations of yours? Why don't you put him out of his misery, Theresa?'

“Nobody asked me, sir, she said,” replied that innocent damsel.

‘Then, to speak plainly,’ replied Lady Leveret, ‘it is your own fault. And, jesting apart, I have been wanting for some time to speak to you about this. I think you must know how anxious we all are to see James settled down; few men have a more brilliant future before them—there is no knowing to what position he may not aspire. My husband tells me his party regard James as quite one of the most rising young men; the only thing he wants is money, and that, of course, he would have if you were less obdurate. There! I hope my plain speaking does not offend you?’ concluded her ladyship, perfectly aware that it would take a great deal of such plain speaking to offend the fair Theresa.

‘Not in the least,’ answered Theresa; ‘only . . .’ and she paused musingly.

‘Only our dear cousin does not “come forward,”’ said Lady Leveret, finishing the sentence for Theresa, and with a touch of acidity in her voice, for she was a little disgusted at Theresa’s ‘confidences,’ though quite determined not to lose sight of the Denton hoards if she could help it. ‘Well,’ she went on, ‘these sort of affairs among us are not done in the Chloe and Lubin fashion, you know—it would, perhaps, be better if they *were*,’ she added, with a sigh; ‘and since I know now, thanks to our little conversation, that there will be no difficulty on *your* part, I will do my best to sound James, and, if Lady Limborne and I cannot bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion, I shall be very much mistaken. And now I must ring for my maid, dear, for it is time to go through the arduous operation of dressing;’ and, suiting the action to the words, Lady Leveret rang for her own ‘lady,’

and dismissed Theresa with a kiss, of a Judas sort, it must be owned, for Theresa's somewhat vulgar 'forwardness' was slightly displeasing to her dainty ladyship.

Theresa could not fail to see that her tactics had been a little too open, but, as she had gained what she wanted, she did not very much care for the slightly scornful way in which her confidences had been received; moreover, she determined to 'pay Lady Leveret out' for her thinly-disguised contempt when she should be able to call that lady 'cousin,' and she made up her mind also to make Lord Limborne suffer for the humiliations she was going through on his account, when once the fatal knot should be tied which should bind him to her, and, as she was firmly resolved, place him 'under her thumb.' For Theresa held the purse-strings, and she had a very plain perception of the advantages this fact would give her.

On the whole, she was satisfied with her own diplomacy, and gave herself up to pleasant dreams of future magnificence as she was driven home in the luxurious Denton brougham.

CHAPTER XI.

A PARAGRAPH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THERESA'S castles in the air, however, were destined to vanish in a very sudden manner, and the elaborate plans which were to end in the enrichment of Lord Limborne, at the expense of 'Uncle Ben's fortune,' were fated to form another illustration of Robbie Burns' dictum that 'the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft aglee.'

A day or two after the 'conference' between Miss Denton and Lady Leveret, and before the latter lady had had an opportunity of 'sounding' her cousin

James upon the very delicate subject of his 'intentions,' that gentleman, having dined at his club, sauntered into the reading-room of that luxurious establishment, and, taking up an evening paper, began to digest its contents; but the one subject of his thoughts was too urgent, and Nelly's face came between his eyes and the print, the old worrying fears and anxieties took their accustomed hold upon him, and, throwing down the paper, he leant back in his chair and gave himself up to the weary thoughts which no occupation could ward off for very long.

It was yet early, and the dining-room of the club was full, while the reading-room was nearly empty. There was, in fact, only one other individual (an acquaintance of Lord Limborne's) present; and this gentleman, who was engrossed in a society paper, only exchanged nods with Lord Limborne as he entered, and went on with his reading. Lord Limborne was

roused out of his reverie by his friend's voice addressing him.

‘Hullo!’ he cried, ‘here’s an item of news that concerns you, Limborne. I congratulate you, old fellow!’ and he walked towards Lord Limborne, with his finger on a passage in the paper he had been reading. It was the announcement of Lord Limborne’s approaching marriage with Theresa Denton; the passage, indeed, which had given the death-blow to poor Nellie’s already almost expiring hopes.

Lord Limborne’s friend was considerably astonished at the effect of his congratulations.

‘Never saw a fellow in such a tare in my life,’ he remarked, shortly afterwards, to an attentive audience in the smoking-room. ‘’Pon my word, I thought he would have hit me: positively glared at me, as if I had insulted him. I only wish some one would read out such a blessed piece of luck to *me*.’

Lord Limborne had, indeed, glared at his innocent friend as if that unoffending person had just put a mortal insult upon him. In truth, he was struck dumb with astonishment at the paragraph at which his startled friend's finger was still pointing.

‘Theresa Denton!’ he was thinking. ‘I never even thought—— How on earth could such a fool’s story have got about? and who was the impertinent busybody who had dared to use his name so freely?’

‘It is a monstrous lie!’ he exclaimed at last, coming to himself, and the absurdity of the position—the two men glaring at each other, like mortal enemies before engaging in a death-struggle. ‘I—I beg your pardon; but I am utterly amazed. I can’t imagine how such a report can possibly have got about, or who could have been so insolent as to publish such a ridiculous paragraph. I beg you will give it my most strong denial whenever you hear the subject mentioned. As for

me, I shall write to the editor, and desire him to deny the report at once and furnish me with the name of his correspondent.' And, with that, Lord Limborne hastily scribbled a few indignant words to the editor of the offending paper.

It was unfortunate that Nellie, who, as we know, saw the announcement which caused Lord Limborne so much annoyance, failed to see the denial which Lord Limborne's note elicited from the next number of the publication; for the sayings and doings of the high and mighty in the land had not much concern for the Armers in their 'reduced circumstances,' and sixpences were not so plentiful as that they could be expended in so profitless a manner as in the purchase of a society paper.

Lord Limborne could not discover the author of the offending paragraph, which the editor informed him, in a polite note profuse with apologies, 'was obtained in the ordinary way of business'—a vague

phrase, which was found to cover a multitude of journalistic sins, and meant that the information was received from some one or other of those hangers-on at the skirts of society, who eke out a narrow income by kindly providing the editors of these twaddling, and sometimes snobbish, 'weeklies' with the odd bits of more or less spicy gossip and slander they manage to pick up in the course of their peregrinations.

Into fairer bosoms besides that of Lord Limborne did this aforesaid paragraph carry confusion and dismay, and Theresa Denton and her mother, and the beauteous Lady Leveret and her spouse, together with Lady Limborne, were consumed with wonder and curiosity as to 'how he' (that is to say, his lordship of Limborne) 'would take it,' and 'who had put it in.' Miss Charlotte Ingle, indeed, who was staying as usual at No. 751, was led to look upon the affair as a somewhat rash 'move' on the

part of the fair and bold Theresa herself, and was not a little astonished at the indignant snubbing she got from that young lady's tongue, when she, with her accustomed delicacy, hinted (something broadly) at her thoughts on the subject.

Lady Limborne was not left long in suspense as to the effect of this 'premature announcement' upon her son. As soon as Lord Limborne had finished his note, and dropped it in the club post-box, he hailed a hansom and drove to Leveret House, in a very disturbed and uncomfortable frame of mind. It was true, he remembered now, that he *had* seen a great deal of Miss Denton, but as to paying her any attentions, or singling her out in such a way as to give a colour of truth to such a report, the thing was absurd! Theresa Denton! good heavens! if she were the last woman left, he should never *think* of such a thing. To think of Nellie, with the impress of gentle nurture in every word and graceful

movement, and then of Theresa Denton, whose bold disregard for the conventional he had not only remarked himself, but had heard discussed in places where young men do congregate! The very idea that his name should be coupled with Miss Denton's was most abhorrent to him. And, then the thought suddenly presented itself to him, if Nellie were to see this abominable paragraph! Great heavens, he said to himself, what would she think of his protestations in that last sad interview of theirs? what a poor mean opinion would she have of her quondam lover! for they had often laughed together at the fair Theresa's eccentricities, and Nellie would think he was going to marry the girl for her money.

Such thoughts as these (which, by the way, would have been anything but honey to Miss Denton) were far from pleasant companions, and Lord Limborne was glad when his cab drew up at the gates of Leveret

House. Lady Leveret was of course out, as she always was unless she was receiving herself, and Lady Limborne was alone ; she was too old to care for the regular and, sooth to say, somewhat monotonous round of dissipation, which was incumbent upon Lady Leveret, and which, indeed, was the very breath of life of that exalted leader of 'the world;' and, accustomed to solitude by her quiet and often lonely life at Limborne Castle, Lady Limborne felt it no hardship, but on the contrary rather a relief, to be 'left to herself.' She was, however, delighted to see her son, and eager to know what he thought of the piece of 'news' just published. Her curiosity was soon satisfied, for, without giving her time to utter a word, he burst out, indignantly,

'Have you seen this infamous untruth? yes, I see, you have. It is abominable that such liberties can be taken with folk's names; the mischief that may be done in

this way is incalculable. Can nothing be done to put a stop to such a state of things?’

‘My dear James!’ said his mother, astonished to see him so moved, ‘of course it is *most* annoying and excessively impertinent on the part of those newspaper people; but I do not see why you should be so very much moved, there is nothing to be ashamed of in the report.’

‘Good heavens! mother,’ exclaimed Lord Limborne, in utter astonishment at hearing such an unaccustomed sentiment from the lips of his mother. ‘I should have thought you would have been the very first person to call out against such an idea.’

‘Well, James,’ said his mother, with some confusion, ‘I of course it is not the sort of alliance I should wish for, but in short such marriages are more common than they were in my young days, and, as your cousin Leveret

says, one must march with the times. Emily Beldon’

‘Oh! is *that* the new “arrangement”?’ said Lord Limborne, interrupting, and with an unpleasant smile. ‘Lady Emily Beldon is Lady Emily Some-one-else—I forget his name—and I am to be honoured with the hand and the money (no small particular in the bargain) of the millionairess, as they call her?’

‘I have seen a great deal of Theresa Denton lately, and I consider her an excellent young person; her opinions are most creditable to her, and I am sure she would soon lose that that ah slight gaucherie, which is her only fault, after she has moved for a little while in our sphere. And, I must say, James,’ continued Lady Limborne, ‘we all thought, that is your cousins, the Leverets, and I, that you were not indifferent to Miss Denton.’

‘How *could* such an idea have possessed

you?' asked her son, 'when I never even thought of Miss Denton, when my whole mind but it is of no use to speak to you on *that* subject.'

'But, James dear,' said his mother, going up to him and seating herself beside him, and taking his hand in hers, and gently stroking it as she spoke, 'I *must* speak to my son, my only child. Do you suppose your mother has not noticed how ill and worn her son is looking. Do not be angry with me, James. I am an old woman, I have only you, and I cannot bear it any longer. This this unnatural estrangement has made me very wretched, James, and to see you so troubled, and not to know the cause, or to be able to help you, or comfort you is more than I can bear. You used to come to me in all your troubles.'

And poor Lady Limborne's pride gave way at last, and she cried bitterly as she clasped her son to her in close embrace,

and clung to him as if she were afraid to lose him, for she was strangely touched at his worn and weary look. Lord Limborne was himself much moved at such a display of affection on the part of his cold and proud mother, and he did his best to soothe her with caresses and kind and loving words. It was not long before Lady Limborne regained something of her ordinary composure; and the keen delight she felt in having, in homely phrase, 'made it up' with her son, made her wonder how she *could* have borne the estrangement for so long, and at the same time determine that *nothing* should induce her to go back to the old miserable state of things.

'But, James dear,' she said, as soon as she was composed enough to speak. 'You *do* look wretchedly ill; what is the matter with you, my poor boy?'

Now Lord Limborne found it rather difficult to answer this question. He, too, was more than rejoiced at returning to the

old affectionate terms with his mother, and most anxious to avoid anything which could call back to her mind the old wretched misunderstandings. The name of Armer was wont to act upon his mother in some such a way as a red rag acts upon a bull, and he hesitated to display this red rag; but Lady Limborne would take no denial.

‘I shall think you are still angry with me, James,’ said she, ‘if you do not tell me what it is that makes you look so worn and worried. I beg you will keep nothing from your mother.’

‘I fear the truth will only anger you,’ said her son, still hesitating; ‘you must remember I wished to spare you the annoyance you have so strongly shown whenever I have spoken to you on the subject.’

‘It cannot be about Miss Armer that you are so troubled?’ asked Lady Limborne.

Lord Limborne did not fail to notice the changed tone in which his mother spoke ; but she had asked for his confidence, and he *must* speak to some one.

‘It is, indeed, Nellie’s fate that makes my life one long anxiety,’ he said at last.

‘Miss Armer’s fate?’ asked his mother, in utter astonishment; ‘why what . . .’

‘Then you have not heard?’ said Lord Limborne. ‘Did you not know that Mr. Armer was ruined, that he is dead?’

‘How should I know, James?’ said Lady Limborne, becoming interested. ‘I have heard nothing of them since I received that—that letter from Mr. Armer.’

‘They are ruined; they have gone from their old house at Hampstead, and I can find no trace of them. Poor Nellie! so unused to hardship; it makes me almost mad to think of her, and to feel I cannot help her.’

‘But, surely, James,’ said Lady Limborne, ‘her relations will help them;

there must be some one who would do something for them.'

'That is it which makes me so anxious,' said her son; 'they have no one upon whom they could have any claim, and how can Jack, who never did any work in his life, support himself and his sister? If I could only find her! but I have thought of every possible clue, and I have tried everything, but in vain.'

'My poor boy,' said Lady Limborne. 'I never knew you felt so strongly about it. I did not know you cared so much.'

'Cared so much,' echoed her son. 'I care for nothing else; my life is one long misery till I find her, and how to do this I know not. Good heavens! how can you speak like that? have I not told you time after time of my—my love for Nellie; when I think of what might have been—for she loved me—I almost lose my reason;' and Lord Limborne, quite unmanned, turned his face from his mother, and, as he

leant with his arms upon the mantel-piece, Lady Limborne could see the strong frame shaken with the depth of his sorrow and anxiety.

Bitterly did Lady Limborne reproach herself for her obstinate pride as she watched her son, and knew that, had it not been for her, he would have been spared a sorrow he scarcely, strong man as he was, knew how to bear. And as her memory swiftly placed before her the events of the last few months, she cursed her pride, which had not suffered her to see how deeply her son's happiness was engaged. Some pangs of jealousy, too, she felt at the power this girl had won so easily, but all her feelings ended in a great longing to comfort him and help him, and very timidly the proud Lady Limborne drew near, and lightly touched her son.

‘James,’ she said, softly, ‘do not give way like this. Oh! James, I cannot bear

to see you. I have been very wrong, James; can you forgive me?’

Without turning round, for he was ashamed of his weakness, he held out his hand. How eagerly did his mother seize upon it, and, with words of endearment which seemed to fall strangely from those proud lips, kiss and caress it!

‘If I had only known, James,’ she said, ‘oh! how could I have been so hard! I thought it was all for the best, indeed, indeed I thought so. And I have suffered, too, oh! how bitterly no one can ever know. It was so hard to live without my boy’s love, and I hated her for coming between us, and that made me hard and cruel. How gladly would I recall the past!’

‘Ah! mother,’ said Lord Limborne, turning round at last. ‘It is too late, now.’

‘Surely not, James,’ said Lady Limborne; ‘people are not lost like that, now-a-days, we *must* find them, and my kind-

ness and love for your wife shall blot out the miserable past. Come, tell me what you have already done, and I will see if woman's wit cannot help you.'

Lord Limborne could scarcely believe he was awake, and not dreaming, as his mother listened to the tale of disappointments he told her, and earnestly discussed the ways and means of discovering the once hated and despised Helen Armer.

'Even if we were successful, and were to find them,' said Lord Limborne, as they ended their long talk and came to the sad conclusion that all had been done that could be done, 'I fear Nellie would resent my search for her, and refuse to see or speak to me. You do not know how proud she is.'

'But if I were to go myself to her,' said Lady Limborne, 'and ask her to forgive my pride; if she loves you, James, as you say she does, if I were to beg her to come to me as my daughter and your wife, she

must consent, and consent she shall, for I will not leave her until she does.'

'Alas! my mother,' said Lord Limborne, with a sad smile, 'you forget that we have not found her yet.' And taking an affectionate farewell of his mother, for it was now late, he returned to his chambers, wondering at the strange change that had come over his mother, and sadly thinking of how differently it all would have ended had that change only taken place but a few months ago.

The appearance of the paragraph which caused Lord Limborne so much disturbance was also the cause of not a little embarrassment to the 'other party concerned,' namely Miss Theresa Denton, and, had it not been for a very keen desire to find out how Lord Limborne would take it, she would have fled from No. 751, and sought in the solitude of Wreford an escape from the very awkward position the paragraph placed her in. If it is

annoying for a man to have the blushing honours of matrimony thrust upon him 'unbeknownst,' how much more embarrassing is it for a young lady to figure in print as the bride-elect of a gentleman who has not as yet done her the honour to consult her wishes on the tender subject, and who perhaps has not the faintest intention of making any such delicate overtures, or against whom she may have a very decided prejudice, amounting it may be to dislike or even disgust.

To be congratulated upon one's approaching nuptials is not one of the happiest privileges of the engaged young man, who, sometimes, finds it necessary to rub up his powers of repartee, and turn off the awkwardness of the situation by the use of a certain modicum of 'chaff.' What there is of the funny in the exceedingly important step which is the subject of congratulation, it is difficult to imagine; and yet some people seem to deem it necessary to regard

the whole matter as a joke ; perhaps it is on the Spartan principle of hiding the wolf that is gnawing at their own vitals, or it may be a certain cynical delight at finding others 'in the same boat.' At any rate, the merriment which appears to be *de rigueur* on these occasions is not seldom of a somewhat forced nature, which fact appears to hint at something, not so funny, after all, in the background. On the lady's side, however, there is not so much jocularly imported into the congratulations : it is the natural end and consummation of a woman's life (*pace* the 'shrieking sisters!') and her feminine friends and relations import a reality into their felicitations, whether inspired by envy or by affectionate interest, which is decidedly wanting in the more or less humorous remarks on the subject of which the young *man* is the victim.

The Dentons' new friends and acquaintances did not fail to see the announcement

of the elder 'Denton girl's' engagement. Nobody was in the least degree surprised. Theresa had made herself quite conspicuous by her attentions to Lord Limborne and to that desirable *parti's* mother, and Mrs. Denton's ambiguous remarks and meaning smiles, the answers she gave to 'fishing' questions on the subject, had quite prepared the way for the item of news in question. The result of all this manœuvring would have been pleasant if Theresa and her mother had been certain of their game; but they knew well enough that the game was not by any means safely bagged yet, and they feared lest this premature step on the part of some officious gossip-provider or other would have the effect of disturbing the sport and making the bird 'shy.' The shoals of cards, which in the course of the afternoon amounted to a formidable heap, and which, as evidences of their social success, were gratifying, were not so pleasing when looked upon as

the forerunners of congratulations which possibly might have to be received with a feigned innocence and an indignant denial.

Under the circumstances, Theresa decided that the retirement which her mother's boudoir afforded must be her retreat until his lordship 'showed his colours,' and here, solaced by the company of her faithful Charlotte Ingle, and occasionally ruffled by remarks of sarcastic tendency from her sister (the which remarks Theresa put down, perfectly correctly, to the score of envy and malice) the *fiancée*-elect passed some anxious hours. Nor was she over-pleased when the evening train from the west brought her dear father to add his congratulations upon the advancement of the family, as shown in the approaching nuptials. Although the society in which his family moved inspired the millionaire with enough of awe to make him prefer the company of his bailiff and gardeners, yet he took an interest in the doings of

those exalted personages whom he concluded under the name of 'the nobs,' and he had seen in the paper with astonishment and delight that Theresa's and Mrs. Denton's longings were to be crowned with success, and his daughter was to be 'my lady.'

The dismal Henry, who was limper and more dejected than ever under the yoke matrimonial, had been spending a few days in the paternal halls of Wreford, experiencing as much satisfaction as his melancholy disposition could afford him in the temporary escape from the anything but beloved presence of his aristocratic and, sooth to say, contemptuous bride, and her interminable host of brothers and sisters and cousins; for they one and all agreed with their relative in treating her husband with a neglect which he felt to be galling. Mr. Denton would hear of no denial, and his son accompanied him in his triumphant progress to 751, Piccadilly.

‘I see it in the paper this morning, Tresa,’ he exclaimed, bouncing into the boudoir, followed by the doleful one. ‘Only to think, Tresa a ladyship! Well, I never thought it would come to that; a baronet you *might* have had, but a real lord! Ain’t it delicious, Miss Ingle? Come to your father, my dear, and let him kiss your ladyship;’ and Mr. Denton opened his arms and displayed his manly bosom, ready to receive his lovely daughter in a fond paternal embrace.

But that young lady was not so eager to respond to these affectionate advances, and she very calmly continued in her comfortable arm-chair, and refused to move.

‘Nonsense, father,’ she said. ‘How can you talk in such a way! you know nothing about it. Tell him, mother; I suppose he had better know;’ and Mrs. Denton, who had followed her husband and son, informed the former of the true state of affairs.

‘Well, I never!’ said Mr. Denton. ‘Of all the cheek! Them fellows ought to be horsewhipped, a-draggin’ me all the way from Devonshire, and all for nothing. But wait a minute; if his lordship hadn’t meant anything, he’d have come round, or sent you a note to tell you so. Haven’t you heard nothing from him?’

‘The affair is of much too delicate a sort for such a communication,’ said Mrs. Denton. ‘Charlotte quite agrees with me in thinking that we must wait and see. If Lord Limborne’s attentions, which I must say have been marked enough, mean anything, he will not deny the report, and if he does deny the announcement, I shall consider he has treated Theresa shamefully.’

‘Oh! delicacy be hanged, begging your pardon, Miss Ingle,’ exclaimed Mr. Denton. ‘If he don’t show his hand, I shall look him up and ask him his intentions; I ain’t a-going to have my daughters hawked about like that for nothing, I can

tell you.' And Mr. Denton left the room in not quite so jubilant a state of mind as that in which he entered it, and, muttering something about 'something to eat,' he adjourned to the dining-room to satisfy the cravings of his 'inner man,' leaving his family to continue their consultation unassisted by the bright effulgence of his genius.

Mr. Denton had no need to ask Lord Limborne's 'intentions' of that nobleman, for a very curt and decided denial of 'the report which appeared in our weekly contemporary' stared the disappointed family in the face from the pages of the *Times* the next morning, and the other 'dailies' contained also a paragraph stating that 'they had the best of authority for denying the reported engagement between Lord Limborne and the daughter of a wealthy commoner, which appeared in yesterday's "Sayings and Doings."'

To face the curious gaze of 'the world,'

and the sympathetic (?) condolences of friends was more than Theresa, or indeed any of the members of her interesting family, could endure, and, before the 'shades of evening closed around,' the Dentons were on their way to Wreford, leaving the servants to follow with the heavy baggage.

Charlotte Ingle strenuously advised her friends to face it out, but both Theresa and Mrs. Denton were bitterly disappointed, and they had no heart or courage to undergo the necessary ordeal. With difficulty did they restrain the irate head of the family from proceeding to Lord Limborne's rooms and denouncing him as a scoundrel and a traitor; but prudential counsels prevailed, and he was included in the general exodus from No. 751.

CHAPTER XII.

LUCCOMBE TERRACE, CAMDEN TOWN.

LUCCOMBE TERRACE, Carling Road, Camden Town, can scarcely be called an exhilarating locality. It possesses, however, in the eyes of the inhabitants thereof, the great merit of being 'genteel.' No shops vary the depressing monotony of its dreary front, save only the public house which begins the terrace on the right-hand side 'as you go down,' where it debouches from the busy thoroughfare of Carling Road; while even this blot upon the gentility of Luccombe Terrace is of a faint colour, consisting, as it does, of that part of the

‘Seven Stars’ which is devoted to the ‘jug and bottle’ department; and is, moreover, easily overlooked, on account of its manifest convenience in the matter of the ‘supper beer.’

The dulness which not unfrequently attaches itself to the ‘genteel,’ or, to tell the truth of the terrace (as its inhabitants familiarly called the row of houses), the ‘shabby’ genteel, is very strongly pronounced here; for Luccombe Terrace is a no-thoroughfare, ending somewhat blankly in a high and dingy wall, which divides the street from a large timber-yard. The dwellers in the terrace do their own marketing, and no tradesmen’s carts disturb its quiet. It is, however, a favourite hunting-ground of the coster tribe, whose discordant bawlings advise the inhabitants of great bargains to be had, strictly for ready money, in dubious fish and second-hand fruit and vegetables. The great order of the street musicians is also well represented

in the terrace, from the top of the profession, in the shape of the itinerant and excruciating German band, through the piano-organ with its dirty, hirsute Italian and his Whitechapel Sue toggled out in a many-coloured costume of her companion's country, down to the 'hurdy-gurdy,' and the ingenious performer upon two penny whistles at once. Prolific, also, is Luccombe Terrace, and Saturday is made hideous with the squabblings and playings of its innumerable progeny, confined on other week-days, thanks to a paternal government, within the precincts of the neighbouring board-school.

The terrace is not so long a one as that the inhabitants cannot take a direct, personal interest in their neighbours; and much talk was there on the part of the clerks' and shopmen's wives—who, for the most part, made up the sum total of the feminine population—on the subject of Mrs. Crudgers' new lodgers, whose name

was plainly displayed on a neat brass plate on that lady's front-door; which plate announced the fact that 'Miss Armer, teacher of music,' lived there, and at the same time intimated to the Luccombites that an opportunity of satisfying maternal vanity as to the musical powers of daughters was to be obtained at probably a reasonable rate.

Several friendly invitations to 'come in and have a cup of tea' did the little brass plate obtain for that lone widow of a petty Customs House officer, Mrs. Crudgers, and very willing was that respectable lady to partake of the refreshing cup, not unattended with a 'bit of cress,' and perhaps even a muffin and crumpet, or a 'Sally Lunn'; for Mrs. Crudgers was of a sociable disposition, and much averse to hiding the light of her conversational powers under a bushel.

'Poor souls,' she remarked, 'anyone can see with 'arf a heye as they've seen better

days, which is the same 'as happened to myself as is well known, and so I 'ave a feller-feelin' for 'em, as one might say. And as delicate and pretty a little piece as anyone could wish to see, and reminds me of poor dear Crudgers's own niece, Ameliar Potter, which died of a gallopin' consumption, and lies in Kensal Green with a tombstone and 'Of sich is the Kingdom' on it all proper; for Potter, which was that broken down as there was no doin' nothing with 'im, says, "Spare no expense," says he, as could well afford it, being in the undertaking line hisself, and able to do things cheaper than you and me.'

'Wherever do they come from, Eliza?' asked her hostess.

'That I can't tell you, my dear,' replied the mournful Crudgers, 'for, nice as she is and giving no more trouble than she can 'elp, poor thing, yet she's as close as wax, and I can't get nothink out of her, and not a letter have she 'ad, as I can testify;

which is not to be wondered at, for when you're in trouble where's your friends ?'

'If I was you, Mrs. Crudgers,' said a young matron, 'I should feel nervous about 'em ; it ain't respectable not to have no one coming to see you, let alone writing.'

'I should 'ope, by this time,' replied the Crudgers, with some asperity, 'as I know myself too well to 'ave to do with anything as isn't respectable. Better 'ave no one at all than the bell a-goin' all day and crowds running in and out with their dirty boots, as won't even look at sich a thing as a door-scraper or a mat. No, my dear, a month in advance is my terms, and a month in advance I've had. And as to playing on the pianner—well, all I can say is, ours was always a musical family, and me a-singin' in the choir when I was a gall, and I hope I know a good tune when I 'ear it, and play she can, and no mistake about it. The young gentleman ain't no trouble at all neither; comes 'ome as reglar as clockwork,

and 'as 'is tea with a bit of something to it, and as nice-looking and haffable a young man as anyone could wish to see.'

Mrs. Crudgers' good report disposed the inhabitants of the terrace to look upon their new neighbours with that pitying sort of favour with which gentlefolks who have 'come down in the world' are often regarded by the class a rung or two below them on the social ladder; and when it came to be known that Mrs. Watkins, whose position was assured as the wife of a retired butcher who was well-to-do in the world and occupied the double house at the end of the terrace, with a cheerful view over the timber-yard—when it was known that this exalted leader of Luccombite society had sent her daughter Arabella to learn the piano from Miss Armer, there was quite an access of musical zeal in the community, and Nellie had her hands full.

It was a dreary life at the best of it, and rendered the more dreary by its con-

trast with the widely different past. The sorrow and shock of her father's sudden death, the changed conditions of her life, and the constant, though hidden, grief at the loss of her lover, had not failed to leave their marks upon Nellie Armer; nor was the hard and most distasteful daily labour of grinding the elements of music into the—for the most part—unreceptive heads of the daughters of Luccombe likely to assist our heroine in renewing her strength.

Jack, too, was a great anxiety to his sister; if Nellie found poverty and its sordid surroundings heavy burdens to bear, at least she could do her best to carry the load without groanings and grumblings at fate; but this was just what Jack could *not* do, and his constant complainings and bitter discontent were not the lightest of the loads the fragile Nellie had to carry. Jack had always had such a pleasant, easy-going life; even the hated 'daily grind'

at his father's office had been softened down to him by easy hours, and all the agreeable incidences of a large allowance ; but now he was no longer the son of a wealthy stockbroker, 'learning the business' in his father's office, but a clerk, and a very junior clerk to boot, and he must be punctual to the minute in arriving at his employer's office, and must wait till the last stroke of the blissful hour of release before 'leaving off.' His salary, or 'screw,' as he soon learnt to call it, was not a very elastic one, and dwindled down in the most melancholy way when compared with the sum his father had allowed him, and which sum, by the way, he had regarded as quite unequal to the requirements of a gentleman of Mr. John Armer junior's position.

But now the days of extravagant lunches and dinners, of trips 'up the river,' of stalls at the theatres, of hansom cabs, elegant 'gets up,' choice cigars, champagne,

and the rest of it, seemed like a far-off dream of delight, and rendered the present 'tightness of the money market,' with all its attendant discomforts and self-denials, almost intolerable. To come down to the 'bus, to a 'plate of cold at eightpence,' to 'half of stout and bitter,' to daily drudgery, with little or nothing in the way of enjoyment, and, worse than all, with no hope or prospect of improvement in the future, was more than Jack Armer could endure, or, at any rate, endure without an amount of 'letting off of steam' in the way of complaints against fortune, which bore hardly upon his equally unfortunate sister.

There are some men, of course, upon whom adversity acts as a spur acts upon a lazy hack, and who are blessed with an amount of 'go' and obstinacy which *forces* the fates to smile upon them at last; but it is to be feared that such men are in a pitiful minority, and the great bulk of the unlucky accept their bad luck with groan-

ings and railings at fortune, and have no heart to put their shoulders to the wheel and heave the cart out of the rut. Upon this latter class a sudden reversal of fortune has a most unhappy effect; from hopelessness they pass to carelessness, from carelessness to slovenliness, and an eager snatching at anything which can give them a moment's forgetfulness; next come too often drink and dishonesty, and so they go on from bad to worse, till they reach the bottom of the pit, in the work-house or the prison.

Jack was already showing signs of beginning this 'easy descent'; he resented the dulness of the cramped lodgings at No. 7, Luccombe Terrace; he saw through poor Nellie's forced attempts at gaiety; he even resented her feigned cheerfulness. Already he not infrequently, after hastily swallowing the meal which poor Nellie provided (often denying herself in order that 'Jack should have something appe-

tising, poor fellow'), strolled out for a bit — 'it was so stuffy' — which 'strolling out' usually ended in an evening spent in the billiard-room of the convenient and handy 'Seven Stars,' and in company at which, a few months ago, Master Jack would have turned up his nose with supreme contempt.

No wonder then, with all these troubles upon her mind, that Nellie began to remind Mrs. Crudgers of the sad end of Ameliar Potter.

Look at No. 7 now: the last heavy-handed, clumsy-fingered pupil has gone, and the torturing sound of the everlasting 'scales' is over for to-day, at last, and Nellie, who is not yet acclimated to the anything but balmy air of Luccombe Terrace, and is, moreover, utterly done up with the tiresome, though, in a monetary point of view, pleasing procession of pupils, has tidied the solitary sitting-room, brushed up the hearth, and is sitting by the fire doing Jack's 'mend-

ing,' and waiting for the arrival of that individual. The depressing effect of the common order of 'lodgings' furniture is not so pronounced in the lamplight; the curtains are drawn, the fire burns brightly, and Nellie thinks she could be, if not happy, at least contented, if only Jack would bear his burdens better, and cease from causing her these direful apprehensions for his future.

She has as many pupils as she can well attend to. They come to *her* (for indeed there are not many pianos in Luccombe Terrace, though accordions and concertinas abound), and she has not to undergo—with alas! too many of the great ill-paid—the fatigue and misery of trudging through muddy streets, or journeying in damp and draughty omnibuses (fortunate to get a seat after waiting at a street corner for a quarter-of-an-hour in drizzle and fog), or in the stifling atmosphere of the 'Underground.' The small

fees her little pupils bring her mount up to quite a satisfactory sum at the end of the week, and Nellie is already thinking of putting by a little fund—‘for Jack,’ of course; poor Jack, who must find it so hard after Coombridge and Heathfield! and Nellie begins to think of the old Coombridge days, of her dear father, of her lost lover, doubly lost to her now, for she ought not even to think of Theresa Denton’s husband. Nellie is tired and worn-out, and not so strong as she used to be, and the big tears begin to well up in her eyes, and to trickle down one by one upon the sock she is mending for Jack, till she cannot see her work, and must stop and brush away these foolish tears, for it will not do for Jack to find her crying, and—here he is, for that must be his latch-key rattling in the lock; and Nellie hastily dries her eyes, and turns round with a pleasant smile and a wel-

coming greeting as her brother comes into the room.

Jack is too much occupied with his own grievances to notice the traces of tears which Nellie is so anxious to hide from him. Dismal and discontented he usually is now, but to-night he looks more than ordinarily woebegone, so much so that Nellie wonders what new misfortune can have befallen her unhappy brother.

‘Why, what is the matter, Jack?’ she asks, anxiously, as he throws himself into a chair by the fireside without vouchsafing a word.

‘Matter enough,’ answers Jack, staring gloomily into the fire. ‘I can’t stand this sort of thing much longer; it is more than a fellow can bear.’

Nellie wonders what can have happened; but she thinks it best to say nothing, and after a pause Jack goes on again.

‘I always hated this beastly office work,’ he says, without turning round; ‘it is

rank slavery. I had rather break stones on the road. It is hard enough to put up with it when everything goes smoothly; but that old beast Gregson won't let me alone, he is always nagging at me, everlastingly finding fault; not a day passes but he lets out at me, before all those snobs too. I believe he hates me because I'm a gentleman, and he is a cad. "Can't put up with my carelessness much longer; must see a change in me." He'll see a change sooner than he thinks, for I'm not going to be bullied like this; and, if I have much more of it, I'll cut the whole concern.'

The fact is, that Master Jack is eminently unfitted for the position he occupies; his three years and more of training (?) at the university have taught him how to pull an oar, play a tolerable game of brilliards, take a hand at loo, and spend money profusely, but beyond these accomplishments, and a very small smattering of classic lore,

and a still smaller modicum of mathematical proficiency, Alma Mater has done but little for her pupil, and has left him at the end of his curriculum little prepared to force a living from the hands of an unkind fortune. It is true he *might* have availed himself of the opportunities freely enough offered ; but Jack's father was a very rich man, and Jack had no thought but that he should one day step into his father's shoes, and enjoy life as a country magnate, so the chances were never even looked at, and Jack is reaping the harvest of his lazy, easy-going wild-oat sowing.

Nellie went up to her brother, and put her head caressingly on his shoulder.

'Poor old Jack,' she said, 'I know it is hard for you'—she did not hint of any hardness in *her* lot—'and very difficult to be patient ; but you will soon get to know the work, and it will be easier to you then, and—who knows?—why, you may go on and on, and be a great man yet. Think

of how many successful men have begun life as you are beginning !

‘ I don’t think there is much chance of that in *my* case,’ said Jack, with a grim smile. ‘ I’m afraid I’m not going to be the hero of a City romance, beginning with the traditional half-a-crown, and ending with millions of money, baronetcies, peerages, yachts, moors in Scotland, and the rest of it. No, Nellie, I hate the whole lot, and I have half a mind to cut the concern, and go in for a private tutorship, or something of that sort. It’s slavery, I know, but it can’t be a worse slavery than this. Father paid enough for my degree, and I don’t see why I should not make something out of it.’

This new idea of Jack’s filled Nellie’s mind with the direst of forebodings ; it seemed to her so very much like a dropping of the substance, and a grasping at shadows. The eighty pounds a year which Jack’s clerkship brought into the common

purse was substantial enough, and if Jack could be got to stick to his business this salary would be increased. Mr. Armer had not been without friends in the City, and Nellie hoped great things for Jack from this fact, forgetting, or not realizing, how quickly names and persons are forgotten in the rush and haste of money-making and money-losing.

Moreover, if Jack persisted in this new departure, it must mean separation, and how *could* he leave his sister to fight her battle with the world alone? And what would become of Jack without Nellie to look after him? easy-going Jack, who could not say 'no' to any pleasure or indulgence! Besides, Nellie knew something of her brother's attainments, and she had a shrewd suspicion that he would not find it so easy to gain a sphere for the exercise of his educational talents. Altogether the outlook was not a cheerful one, and Nellie was almost in despair at

the new turn Jack's discontent seemed not unlikely to take.

‘But, Jack,’ she said at last, after thinking over the matter, Jack moodily staring into the fire the while, ‘I have heard it is very difficult to get a tutorship, and it would be dreadful if you had to go ever so far away, and leave me here all alone, and after all your place is a certainty. Oh, Jack, I do beg you not to give it up.’

‘You needn't be afraid of my leaving you, Nellie,’ said Jack, looking round at his sister. ‘I could get a mastership in some school in London here, there must be hundreds, so that I could come home at night, or even if I got a private tutorship, which I should like much better, you could come and live somewhere near the place, don't you see? I hate your having to teach all these horrid little cubs.’

Nellie smiled sadly as she wondered in her mind how they would manage to pay the Crudgers, and the butcher and the

baker, and the rest, without the 'horrid little cubs.' But she saw it was no use to talk any more upon the subject at present, and just then the landlady appeared with a 'bit of somethink 'ot,' as she called it, to furnish out the homely meal which Jack was wont to compare, with many growlings and grumblings, with the sumptuous repasts of the Coombridge and Heathfield menages.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

MR. GREGSON, chief clerk in the well-known firm of Messrs. T. and B. Nicholls, stockbrokers, was in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. The life of that methodical individual was, as he pathetically remarked, rapidly becoming a burden to him, and the cause of this unhappy state of affairs was to be found in the conduct of the most junior of the junior clerks, Mr. John Armer. The carelessness and the continual mistakes of that misguided young man brought an amount of unnecessary work into the office, which weighed upon

the soul of Mr. Gregson, and together with his unblushing want of punctuality, and the bad effect his conduct in business generally had upon the 'outer office,' formed the subjects of jeremiads of which 'the governors' were getting intensely weary. Mr. Gregson's god was 'business,' and the dislike, not to say contempt, in which that god was regarded by the latest worshipper at the shrine in Messrs. T. and B. Nicholls' office, provoked Mr. Gregson beyond endurance.

Already Jack Armer had been 'had up before the governors,' and solemnly exhorted and warned; and had these constant complaints, he was told, been preferred against any other one of the clerks, he would long ago have 'got the sack;' but out of kindness to his father's memory, and his own reversal of fortune, his employers generously forgave him, and offered him another chance, greatly to Mr. Gregson's disgust, and entirely against that

trustworthy and valuable servant's advice. Mr. Gregson, on the occasion of the 'wigg'ing' in question, eased his mind by the delivery of some dark and dismal prophecies anent the offending person, and these prophecies met with a painfully speedy fulfilment.

Jack was bitten severely with his new tutorial idea. He pictured to himself such a life as his soul loved and longed for, and saw himself the bear-leader of some titled or wealthy 'cub;' occupying his own set of apartments in some castle or mansion in the country, and varying the monotony of the daily grind at classics and mathematics, by instructions to his pupil in all those branches of a country gentleman's life in which, sooth to say, Master Jack *was* a proficient. The hours of study, and their accompanying tedium, were to be made up for by other hours devoted to riding, driving, shooting, and sport generally.

— Lost in these pleasant probabilities, which at length, by a common mental process, became absolute certainties, Jack became more careless than ever. He was simply wasting his time, he thought to himself, and wearing out his soul and body in a galling slavery, and for a salary which appeared to him contemptible in comparison with the comfortable honorarium my lord, or the squire, was to award him for the care and tuition of the son and heir. The end came somewhat suddenly at last; for Mr. Gregson appeared in his employers' sanctum one fell and fatal afternoon, as those gentlemen were drawing on their gloves and assuming great-coats and hats, preparatory to starting for their homes in the suburbs, and wrathfully remarked that either he or young Armer must go, for warnings and chances were utterly thrown away upon that most unbusiness-like young man, and that very day he had perpetrated an error in making up his books, which

was the last straw, and had broken the back of that not too patient camel, Mr. Gregson's temper.

Messrs. T. and B. Nicholls were naturally impatient at being delayed in their departure to the bosoms of their families, and, hastily coming to the conclusion that 'they could stand it no longer,' they sent the grimly-pleased Gregson with a message to 'Mr. Armer.' Jack had a very shrewd suspicion as to 'what was coming,' and, rendered callous by his dreams of future bliss as a private tutor, he received his dismissal with an equanimity which offended his employers, and put a stop to the kind words of regret which his misfortunes, in spite of his misconduct, would have provoked. His presence in the office only harried the soul of their confidential clerk; and Jack was told 'he need not come there again,' while the abruptness of the dismissal was softened by a handsome gratuity far in excess of his deserts.

And now began the most painful chapter in the story of Nellie's misfortunes. The not very large sum of money which was left to her, after paying all debts, from the kind help of her father's friends, was almost exhausted. This little nest-egg, and the larger part of Messrs. Nicholls' parting gift to Jack, which he gave up to his sister with an exalted sense of his own generosity, was all that stood between Nellie and Jack, and something very like the most abject poverty; for the small fees Nellie received from her little pupils, without the help of Jack's salary, barely sufficed to satisfy Mrs. Crudgers' not too exorbitant demands. Week after week rolled on, and the small capital was, in spite of the most careful of management on Nellie's part, gradually but surely dwindling down. At first Jack was full of fire and hope. He applied to all the educational agencies, he got testimonials from his college, he spent a sum of money in

postage stamps, which caused his sister many qualms, in answering the appointments, whose particulars the scholastic agencies sent him lithographed in red ink, on half sheets of paper; he applied for all kinds of tutorships and masterships, he even spent two or three pounds (also to Nellie's anguish of mind, at the waste of the sorely needed money) in advertisements setting forth his willingness to act as tutor or private secretary, and inviting a reply to B.A., 7, Luccombe Terrace, Camden Town; but, alas! for the emptiness of human hopes, it was, as his sister had feared, all of no avail.

His letters to the various patrons the agencies introduced him to (fortunately 'no fees were to be paid unless an engagement were effected,') met with a chilling silence, or, at best, polite refusals, while his own advertisement drew answers only from similar agencies to the ones he was 'working.' As time went on, poor Jack lost

heart; from the lofty visions of desirable private tutorships, he came down step by step, until at last he would have accepted with joy the drudgery of an ushership in a third or fourth-rate school. Morning after morning he carefully conned the advertisement sheets of the *Times*, which he borrowed for an hour from the 'Seven Stars,' for the sum of one penny per diem, and day after day he trudged to such addresses as seemed to afford him a chance of employment; but he could get nothing to do; in many cases his 'gentlemanly appearance' (as the police-court phrase goes) was against him; hundreds of other young men, better qualified by far than was Jack Armer, were applying, and night after night Jack returned to Luccombe Terrace to meet Nellie's anxious look of inquiry with a hopeless shake of the head.

In sheer desperation, after two months of weary disappointment, Jack wrote to his former employers; but Messrs T. and B.

Nicholls had had enough of Mr. Armer, and no reply was vouchsafed to his letter of penitence and appeal.

At length the wolf made his fell appearance at the door of No. 7 in grim earnest ; the little stock of capital was quite exhausted, the last sovereign had been changed, and had melted away, and poor Jack with a shame-faced air had more than once appeared in the narrow boxes in the pawn-broker's shop to answer the question, 'How much?' Even this last resource of the destitute was gradually exhausted, and Jack's rings and studs and watch-chain, and Nellie's trinkets, the sad memorials of better days, had gone, and Jack's gold watch was exchanged for a silver one before he had time to learn to march boldly to the shrine of the 'three golden balls,' and to chaffer and haggle with the 'young man,' in order to persuade that hard-hearted Hebrew to 'make it five bob.'

Nellie's health was at last giving way under the dreadful strain of fear as to the future; she almost starved herself, too, in the anxious endeavour to 'cut down expenses' already pared down to starvation point; and as she felt daily less and less able to bear the strain of her work, and began to fear lest she should be overcome by the faint feeling which now and again visited her, and was, in fact, the result of the mental strain and under-feeding, the most horrible dread seized upon her, and, were it not for Jack, she could almost have prayed to be taken from a life which was rapidly becoming insupportable.

'If she were to "give up," what would become of them? The few shillings she so hardly earned were all that stood between them and that last home of poverty, the Workhouse.'

And at this dreadful thought Nellie braced herself up again, and toiled on in spite of dire sickness of body and of soul.

And still Jack made his daily pilgrimages, and still he returned with the same monotonous tale of failure.

But the old proverb which affirms that 'the longest of lanes has its turning' was to have another confirmation in the case of our sorely-tried heroine and her brother.

They had come to the very dregs of the bitter cup of poverty, and were to lose the shelter and comfort of hearth and home. Mrs. Crudgers, in pity for her unfortunate lodgers, had broken through her hard and fast rule, and had allowed them to become three weeks in arrears with their rent; but, as she observed to Nellie, 'she was a poor woman, and, though it wrung her 'eart to 'ave to say it, go they must before the week was out; she wouldn't say nothing about what was owed, trusting they would pay her when better days should come, for she knowed what it was to want herself, and if she didn't give herself the airs of some folks which should be nameless, with their turn-

ings-up of their eyes and their textes, she had been brought up pious, and knowed her catechism and her dooty to her neighbours, which, if *they* knowed it, they didn't show it anyhow.'

This intimation, which Nellie had been painfully dreading for some time, was given on the Monday, and, during Jack's absence on his dreary, hopeless quest for work, Nellie had, after dismissing her last pupil, been searching for a couple of rooms which should be near enough to Luccombe Terrace for her pupils, and within the extremely narrow compass of her weekly earnings. The rooms, or one of them at least, must be respectable enough not to shock the tender susceptibilities of the mothers of Luccombe, her employers, and it seemed a hopeless task to bring these two adverse elements, gentility and cheapness, together. Nellie returned to No. 7 in a despairing frame of mind after a long and fruitless search. As she drew near to the door, to

her intense astonishment, she saw Jack, apparently bereft of his senses, making violent gestures expressive of delight (a rare visitor at No. 7) and frantically waving a newspaper above his head. As soon as he caught her eye, he disappeared, and, before Nellie could turn the handle of the door, it was thrown widely open, and she found herself in Jack's arms, with the paper fluttering over her.

Jack was positively hysterical with joy ; he laughed and cried in one breath, and could scarcely utter a coherent sound. It was plain enough to see that it was something in the paper which occasioned this unaccustomed burst of hilarity, and Nellie at first supposed that he must have seen 'just the very thing' in the way of employment, and, with a sudden return of his old sanguine characteristics, have jumped to the end of the matter without going through the necessary preliminaries of application, testimonial showing, and the

too familiar final rejection. But she was mistaken; it would have required a great deal more than the most promising advertisement that ever put heart of grace into the unemployed to have stirred the now despondent Jack in such an extraordinary manner. In vain Nellie searched the paper while Jack grinned in the most provoking way at her efforts to discover the cause of his overflowing glee.

‘Give it up, Nellie?’ he said, as Nellie asked him, for about the twentieth time, ‘what it all meant?’ ‘Well! then, look here!’ he said, pointing to a paragraph in the agony column of the *Daily Telegraph*, ‘Look here!’ and Jack read out, with infinite gusto:

‘ARMER.—If Miss Armer, formerly of Coombridge, in the county of Devon, will apply to Messrs. Avery and Simpson at 213, Bedford Row, London, W.C., she will hear of something greatly to her advantage.’

‘There! Miss Armer, formerly of Coombridge, in the county of Devon, what do you think of *that*?’ said Jack, triumphantly.

‘Oh! Jack,’ said Nellie, ‘what *can* it be? Can it be possible that there is going to be an end of all this misery? Oh! it is *too* good to be true.’

‘Just let me tell you all about it, old lady,’ said Jack. ‘I went to those agents in Sackville Street to see if anything by any possibility might have turned up, and the clerk fellow was anything but civil, said the principal was engaged. I said I would wait, and as I was waiting I took up the *Telegraph*, and the very first thing I saw was our name staring me in the face in this blessed advertisement. You can guess I did not wait much longer, but rushed off as hard as I could pelt to 213, Bedford Row. I sent in my name, and in a minute or two I saw Mr. Avery. He was very civil, but shy of saying anything. I told him I was your brother, and asked him

what it was all about. Poor old Gidley is dead, died abroad, and he has left you some of his money, that was all I could get out of the cautious Avery, and you are to go there to-morrow morning to hear all the particulars. I have been waiting in for ever so long for you. The lawyer wanted to wait upon *you*, but I thought of Luccombe Terrace, and I thought you would rather go to them.'

'Poor Mr. Gidley!' said Nellie, who, as may well be imagined, had been listening with eager attention to Jack's story. 'Poor old man, to die all alone among strangers! and how kind and good of him to think of me, after all those dreadful quarrels with father. If he could only know the *intense* relief his kindness is to me, and how grateful I am.'

'I wonder what he has left you?' said the unfeeling Jack. 'Anyhow, if it is only a few hundred pounds it will take us out of this hole, and give us a chance some-

where or other; he must have made a frightful lot of money, look how quietly he lived, never spent anything hardly, and no children or family, or anything. I wonder if he had any nephews or nieces?’

‘Of course he had, Jack,’ said Nellie; ‘very rich people who used to look down upon him when he was poor. Don’t you remember how he used to tell the story of how his brother and his brother’s children tried to make friends with him when he first went to live in Bedford Square?’

‘No, I don’t remember anything about it,’ said Jack. ‘All I know is that Miss Armer is going to hear something greatly to her advantage, and that this horrible life is going to be ended.’

‘Do not be too sanguine, Jack,’ said Nellie, warningly; ‘you will be so fearfully disappointed if it turns out to be nothing very much after all.’

‘Never fear,’ said Jack, exultingly, ‘they would not have put “greatly,” do you

see?' he asked, pointing to the paragraph. "Greatly" to her advantage, my dear, they would not have put that if it had been a trifle.'

Far on into the night the brother and sister sat up discussing this wonderful piece of news, and it was not until the small hours that they separated: Jack to dream golden dreams, and Nellie to think of the kind old godfather sinking to his last long rest in a foreign country, and with strange faces around his bed.

The next morning Jack was up betimes; he was too restless to sleep long, and he gave Nellie no peace, but kept calling out to know 'how long she would be,' so eager was he to renew the last night's discussion, and to get through the time until the hour of the meeting with the lawyers in Bedford Row.

Mrs. Crudgers was astonished, too, at this departure from the young gentleman's ordinary habit of late rising, and ven-

tured to ask him, as she lit the fire in her lodger's sitting-room, 'What was up?'

'Up, Mrs. Crudgers? Why, *I'm* up, ain't I?' said Jack, 'and *you're* up, and money's up——'

'Which I wish it *was*!' exclaimed Mrs. Crudgers, 'for it's low down enough with me, I can tell yer, and very glad I shall be for the trifle as is owing.'

'Mrs. Crudgers,' said Jack, 'you shall have it; this very day the obligation shall be discharged, and a suitable honorarium added by way of interest or usury.'

'I'm sure it's very kind of you,' said the landlady, 'and I always did say that for haffableness and genteel conduct Mr. Harmer hain't got no equal.'

Just then Nellie came down, and received Mrs. Crudgers' congratulations on the 'slice of luck as she was given to understand had come to them.'

Breakfast and a long confabulation—chiefly a monologue on Jack's part—

brought them to ten o'clock, and Jack and Nellie started to walk in the bright and still wintry sun to the office of Messrs. Avery and Simpson. Here a fresh surprise awaited them. They were received with the greatest politeness, and in a few minutes were in possession of the whole story. Mr. Gidley had died a month ago at Nice ; his old housekeeper was with him to the last, and, with the exception of a handsome provision for that faithful servant and friend, the whole of his large fortune was left to 'his beloved god-daughter, Helen Armer.' Mr. Gidley had made large sums of money, and had lived sparingly, and Nellie was now a very rich young lady indeed.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY LIMBORNE AND NELLIE.

IF Nellie had been only a few minutes later in leaving the lawyer's office in Bedford Row, she would have had the felicity of seeing a very old friend of hers, no less a person, in fact, than her old lover Lord Limborne. After the reconciliation with her son, Lady Limborne returned to Limborne Castle ; but she found it impossible to settle down into her old solitary life, her heart was in London with her son, she could no longer take any interest in the quiet and monotonous occupations which once satisfied her, and as Lord Lim-

borne's ample salary, together with the money his pen brought him, did away with the impossibility of a modest establishment in London, Lady Limborne begged him to take a small house, and allow her to come up and live with him. Now that there was no bar or misunderstanding between them, Lord Limborne's affection for his mother returned with its old force, and he was himself thinking of making some such proposition when his mother's letter reached him. He at once agreed to her request, and in a short time the new menage was established in Dover Street, greatly to the content of both mother and son. Constantly and anxiously thinking of Nellie, and hoping against hope that one day he should come upon some trace of her, Lord Limborne was glad of the opportunity his mother's presence gave him of occasionally unburdening his heart, sure now of her affectionate sympathy, and Nellie Armer had become a

frequent topic of conversation with them. The advertisement had already appeared in the daily papers in several issues, but neither did Lord Limborne nor did his mother take much interest in the agony column of the *Times*. On the morning, however, of Nellie's visit to Messrs. Avery and Simpson, as Lady Limborne and her son were at breakfast, and leisurely looking through the paper the while, each reading out from his or her share of the *Times* such items of news as seemed to be of interest, Lady Limborne gave such a start of surprise as to make her son look up and ask what it was that she had seen.

‘I think, James, this will interest you,’ said Lady Limborne, handing him the first sheet of the *Times* with her finger upon the fac-simile of the advertisement which Jack had seen in the *Daily Telegraph*.

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Lord Limborne, ‘of course, it is Nellie, and I shall see her at last after all these weary months

of waiting. I will go at once to these lawyers, find out her address, and go to her ;' and he rose hastily from the table.

'Wait one moment, James,' said his mother, 'do nothing in such a hurry, the lawyers will not run away,' she said, smiling at her grave and quiet son's lover-like eagerness ; 'let us think it over before we act.'

'I shall not rest until I have seen her,' said Lord Limborne, chafing at the delay.

'Now, James, be sensible for one moment,' said Lady Limborne ; 'you know nothing of what has or what may have happened to Helen' (for so had Lady Limborne come to speak of 'that Miss Armer,') 'and, if you will abide by my advice, you may save yourself from being placed in a painful, perhaps even a ridiculous, position.'

'What *can* you mean, mother?' asked Lord Limborne, somewhat impatiently.

'Why, this, my dear boy,' answered his mother, with a slight touch of her old

acerbity. 'You do not wish to pour out the full tide of your lover-like eloquence to another man's wife.'

'I never thought of that,' said her son, in some dismay at the idea; 'but,' he added, brightening up, 'it is impossible. I am quite certain of her affection.'

'The insolence and conceit of these men,' said Lady Limborne, with a laugh. 'But, seriously, James, you do not know what has happened, or to what straits they may have been driven; and, if you take my advice, you will certainly go to these lawyers, and find out their address; and I think you had better let *me* go and see Helen.'

'Why, mother, you have——'

'Yes, I know what you are going to say, James,' interrupted Lady Limborne; 'and still I think my plan a good one. I wish to make the best amends in my power; and, before I sink into the dowager,' she added, with a smile, 'I want to make

friends with the powers that are to be. I have often thought it all over, James, and I beg you to give way to me in this ; it will be for the best. If all is as you say, and I, too, wish it, and if Helen still loves you and is free, I want to see her first of all, and to ask her to come to me as my daughter and my son's wife. She knows how bitterly I have been against her ; and, the awkwardness will be less, if it is boldly faced in this way. She may, perhaps, refuse to see you (you have often told me how proud she is), if she thinks I am still opposed to her.'

'It is good and kind of you, mother,' said Lord Limborne ; 'and, I think, it is the best way, after all.'

'I am *sure* it is,' said Lady Limborne. 'And now, order the carriage, and we can drive together to these lawyer people ; and, when we have found the address, I can go on alone, and you must come here and wait for my return.'

In a very short time, Lord Limborne and his mother were driving towards Bedford Row, which abode of the Law they reached a few minutes after Jack and Nellie had left. Lord Limborne's card procured him an instant audience with the firm, and on his explaining his friendship with the Armers, and his long anxiety as to what had become of them, he was informed at once that Miss Armer and her brother had only just left the office; and, as Messrs. Avery and Simpson saw no reason why anyone should be anything but pleased at a visit from a 'lord,' Lord Limborne was bowed out of the office, with the address, No. 7, Luccombe Terrace, Carling Road, Camden Town, written upon a slip of paper.

Carling Road is a well-known thoroughfare in the not too aristocratic quarter in question, and the coachman drove off quickly with his mistress, leaving Lord Limborne to make his way back to Dover

Street as best he might ; for, though he begged Lady Limborne to let him accompany her, this would have interfered with her plans, and she sternly refused.

Jack's head was quite turned with his sister's good fortune, in which he very rightly expected he would have no inconsiderable share. He wanted Nellie to leave No. 7 that very day, and go to some hotel in the West End, until they should make up their minds what to do next ; in fact, his soul longed to emerge from the chrysalis state of the last long dreary months into the butterfly existence that was his before misfortune's iron fingers had so cruelly pinched his sister and himself. But Nellie was bewildered with the suddenness of the change. She wanted some days of quiet to realise her new position, and she firmly refused to leave her old lodgings at any rate until the end of the week ; although the comfortable bundle of bank-notes which Messrs. Avery

and Simpson had bestowed upon her, as an earnest of good things to come, would have enabled her to do as Jack so earnestly wished, and so eagerly urged. He had to content himself with a munificent toll taken from the bundle before-mentioned, and, after walking some little distance with Nellie on their way home to No. 7, he began to feel the money burn in his pocket. A contempt for his somewhat seedy 'outer man' took sudden hold upon him, and telling Nellie he should look up his tailor and order some respectable clothes, so as not to disgrace their good fortune, he put her into a cab, and departed in great glee to follow once more his favourite occupation of 'spending money!'

As Nellie was driven along the somewhat sordid streets towards her lodgings, some order evolved itself from the chaos of her mind, and the old aching sense of loss at the thought of her lover came back to her, and with an added force, since now

she was rich enough to satisfy even the ambitious views of Lady Limborne, and to gild over the want of birth which that lady had obstinately and erroneously imputed to her. But it was of no use thinking of it all, for Lord Limborne, with an easy forgetfulness for which she had not given him the credit, had married (as she thought) Theresa Denton, and all that sweet and bitter chapter of her history must be closed for ever. She little thought of what was awaiting her in the dingy 'parlour' of No. 7.

The news of the Armers' 'bit of luck' had formed an appetising topic of conversation to such of the gossips of Luccombe Terrace as Mrs. Crudgers had had an opportunity of confiding in; such an excellent piece of news certainly would not improve with keeping, and, before Nellie left the office of Messrs. Avery and Simpson, the story of Mrs. Crudgers' lodgers was talked over from end to end of the

short row of houses. Naturally, the story did not lose in the telling, and Jack's admission of that morning to his landlady was amplified and extended until quite fabulous sums were named as their new inheritance, with all that gusto which is felt in the rolling large sums of money over the tongue. It was, therefore, felt to be quite in the natural order of things that a 'private carriage' should drive up to the door of the fortunate ones, and that a 'beautifully-dressed' lady should alight, and enter those narrow portals. As the carriage waited there for some time, opportunity was given for the satiating of curiosity in the examination of its quiet but well-appointed details; and, when a 'coronet' was perceived upon the panels, the excitement rose to fever-heat, and the return of Nellie was awaited with an universal tip-toe of expectation.

Nellie dismissed her cab at the corner, for she knew quite enough of the curiosity

of her neighbours, and she did not wish to excite their powers of prying by the unusual spectacle of a cab 'in the terrace.' The sight of a brougham there did not astonish her until she found it was standing opposite her own number, for she thought, at first, that 'some one was ill,' and that it was that expensive luxury, the doctor's carriage. Wondering what it could possibly mean, she hastily entered her room, and found herself face to face with Lady Limborne!

Lady Limborne had had ample time to digest the forlornness and poverty of Nellie's surroundings; she was, of course, thoroughly well aware of the comfort and luxury of Nellie's past, and the contrast between the surroundings of that past and the dreary dinginess and poverty-struck look of Mrs. Crudgers' rooms touched and moved her strangely. When she saw Nellie, whom she remembered as a bright, merry, and exceedingly pretty girl, when she saw

Nellie, as she turned into the gate, a thin, careworn phantom of her former self, her heart yearned towards her, and she longed to take her in her arms and comfort her; and, indeed, as Nellie entered her room, Lady Limborne *did*, to Nellie's utter astonishment and confusion, go up to her, take her hand, and kiss her kindly, and with tears in her eyes.

'Lady Limborne here!' said Nellie, in tones of amazement; 'to what'

'My dear,' said Lady Limborne, still holding Nellie's hand, and looking earnestly at her, 'I have come to ask your pardon for the past. I have come as my son's ambassador to speak to you for him.'

'For James? For Lord Limborne?' said Nellie, more and more astonished.

'Yes! my dear Helen—for so you must let me call my new daughter—for James,' said Lady Limborne. 'I have learnt now how truly his happiness is bound up in you, and I have come to beg you to put

aside all foolish pride, and come to me as my daughter and my son's wife.'

'But but' faltered Nellie, sinking down into a seat, 'I thought . . .'

'You thought he had forgotten you,' said Lady Limborne, with a kind smile, drawing up a chair close to Nellie, and leaning forward and taking her hand. 'I can assure you, my dear, that you are very much mistaken; he has not ceased to think of you and to search for you ever since he lost all trace of you after your father's death.'

'But,' said Nellie, 'I saw in the papers that he was married—married to Theresa Denton.'

'And you did *not* see the contradiction of the report which immediately followed?' said Lady Limborne. 'Does that account for these poor thin cheeks? But you have not answered my first question. Is James to be rewarded for his long suit and service, or, perhaps, *you* have forgotten *him*?'

Nellie was utterly confounded at this new turn in her life's history ; she scarcely knew whether she was in her right senses, whether it was not all a dream, and that she should in the next moment wake up and find herself in the old, anxious, fearful frame of mind. But Lady Limborne was a substantial evidence enough, and she held Nellie's hand and was looking in her eyes. Nellie answered her question in a scarcely conscious way, still oddly under the idea that it was all a dream, and that the next instant she would awake.

‘I have loved James ever since he first spoke to me,’ she said, looking straight before her, and speaking as to herself, ‘ay, and before that I loved him ; and I thought he had forgotten me ; oh ! it was cruel, it was hard to bear it, for I loved him so, and I have always, always thought of him ; even when I thought I ought to forget him, I could not. All through this dreadful misery I wondered what he

would think if he could only know; and now it is all over, and you tell me, *you*, who hated me so, you tell me it is not true, James did *not* forget me, and he loves me still.' And poor Nellie fell back fainting in her chair; it was all too much for her, the strain of the last few days had been more than her strength, enfeebled by ill-health and want of food, could endure, and for some moments she lay unconscious in Lady Limborne's arms, while that lady strove to restore her to consciousness. Lady Limborne was not alarmed, for she knew that joyful tidings seldom do long harm, and in a very few minutes Nellie opened her eyes to meet the affectionate gaze of her once bitter enemy.

As soon as Nellie was recovered from the shock and become herself again, Lady Limborne insisted upon her accompanying her home there and then. To this Nellie at first demurred; but Lady Limborne painted such a dismal picture of her son's

disappointment, should she return without Nellie, and affirmed, too, that she was quite unable to prevent him from rushing off incontinent to No. 7, and as Nellie had her own objections to being seen in such a sorry frame, and had a very distinct longing to see the faithful James, she at length consented, and the Luccombites had the proud privilege of seeing one of the dwellers in their tents driving off in company with a 'grand lady,' in a private carriage, '*with* a coronet on its panels.'

Nellie left a note for Jack, which that young gentleman received on his return in the course of the afternoon, with the goods and chattels which had been left in the charge of his accommodating 'uncle' at the sign of the 'three balls.' As he was returning from visits to his old tradesmen, it struck him he might as well get the unpleasant job over at once, for some of the articles pledged were old family trinkets from which nothing but the direst

necessity would have forced the Armers to part; he therefore chartered a cab, and appeared with his spoils, intending to give his sister a pleasant surprise. Not a little astonished was he to find the bird flown, and a note for him, which Mrs. Crudgers delivered, with her volubility much subdued under the weighty knowledge of what angels she had been entertaining un-awares, angels who had friends with coronets on their carriages! Jack's astonishment considerably increased when he found from Nellie's hasty lines where she had gone, and was told that he was to follow her, and take things for the night, for that they were to stay in Dover Street.

'Whew-w-w!' he whistled, softly, '*that* is the way the wind blows. "Lady Limborne has been *so* kind."—"Would insist on my coming."—"Desires me to say how pleased she will be to see you." How on earth did the old cat' (so he irreverently termed her ladyship) 'find out about Nell's

money? Most extraordinary! Can't make it out! Anyhow, I shan't stay in this hole all alone, and I shall be glad to see old Limborne again; and if Nell and he make it up *I* shan't object, for I feel sure she had a sneaking kindness . . . but by George! he's married! Well, I give it up, and here goes;' and Jack shovelled his evening dress and night-gear into a venerable portmanteau, and, sending the obsequious Crudgers out for a hansom, he was soon bowling along in the direction of Dover Street.

It must be confessed that, in her inability to understand Lady Limborne's sudden change of manner, Nellie, as they drove along towards her lover's home, imagined that, by some means hidden from her, Lady Limborne had come to the knowledge of her change of fortune; and the fact that she would not come to her husband empty-handed had a great deal of weight with her, in making her

give way to Lady Limborne's persuasions that she would return to Dover Street with her.

As they drove along, she was disabused of this mistake ; for Lady Limborne asked Nellie, ' what was the great advantage the lawyer had for her,' and she was so utterly and unfeignedly astonished at Nellie's answer—at the same time, not scrupling to declare her satisfaction—that Nellie had the additional joy of knowing she would have been received gladly, poor and penniless as she was, by the son, and, what was more extraordinary still, by the mother too.

The one man—who, with two maids and the coachman, formed the modest Limborne *ménage*—was gazing abstractedly out of the dining-room window, after the manner of his kind, as Lady Limborne and Nellie returned, and, perceiving his mistress's carriage coming, he opened the front-door ; so that Lady Limborne and

Nellie entered without the preliminary heralding of the door-bell, for which Lord Limborne was impatiently listening in his study at the back of the house—a room in which the noise of the street in the front was softened to a continuous hum. Hence his mother and his sweetheart reached the door without his knowing that they were in the house.

This gave Lady Limborne a chance she was quick to avail herself of; and opening the door softly, and gently pushing Nellie forward, she said, ‘James, I have brought you your wife;’ and, without another word, she turned round, and quickly left the study, closing the door behind her.

We, too, will observe the same discretion, being perfectly certain that the two lovers so long separated, and so cruelly treated by adverse fortune, must have a great deal to say to each other, which does not in the least concern, and probably

would be extremely uninteresting to, any other person but themselves.

It was a pleasant party that sat down to dinner in Dover Street that night; for, if Lord Limborne and Nellie were somewhat quiet, Jack was overflowing with spirits, and Lady Limborne was a complaisant listener to all his somewhat boyish talk. Lord Limborne's keen and full delight at regaining his long-lost treasure was somewhat marred by anxiety as to her health, for Nellie certainly looked very frail; but she told him that happiness is the best medicine of all, and that all she wanted was a little rest and quiet.

Much discussion as to future plans took place during the next few days, for Nellie did not go back to Luccombe Terrace, but sent Jack, with a handsome donation, to Mrs. Crudgers, and the present of the piano, long the text upon which Mrs. Crudgers descanted at large upon 'them

lucky lodgers of hers.' At length, after many plans proposed, it was decided that Nellie should accept Mrs. Bolland's invitation (that lady had been informed of the Armers' change of fortune), and that Lord Limborne and Jack should stay at Limborne Castle, and superintend the doings of the workmen who were at Nellie's express desire, and with some of Mr. Gidley's fortune, to restore that venerable pile to something like its former magnificence, while Lady Limborne would remain in London until just before the day fixed upon for the wedding. Very happy days were those, when Nellie was day by day gaining fresh roses in the sweet Coombridge air, and in her lover's constant company, fit preludes to the happy day itself, when Coombridge Church, decorated prettily with the sweet flowers of early summer, by kindly hands (for 'Miss Nellie' was not forgotten by humble village friends), was filled to over-

flowing, on the occasion when Lord Limborne took Nellie 'to have and to hold,' etc. It was a very quiet wedding, for the Bollands were quiet folk, and Nellie was married from their house; all the public rejoicings were put off until some six weeks later, when Lord Limborne brought the new chatelaine to Limborne Castle.

Lady Limborne accepted the position of 'the dowager' with a complacency not a little enhanced by the very considerable improvement in the Limborne affairs which her successor's unlooked-for fortune brought about. She very wisely refused to make the 'number three' who is proverbially *not* company, and made the house in Dover Street her head-quarters, paying occasional visits to the Castle, and seeing a great deal of her son and daughter-in-law, for Lord Limborne's official duties, which at no very distant date were to become of a more important nature, involved long visits to

London, and he and Nellie spent many months in the year in Dover Street. The ceaseless whirl of London society, to which their position and means and their connection with the great Lady Leveret would have given them an easy entrée, had no charms for our heroine, who found in the society of her husband, and his literary and political friends and their families, a pleasant enough acquaintance, while the care and nurture of an Honourable Master Limborne and his brothers and sisters, as time went on, gave her plenty of happy occupation.

Jack Armer returned with glee to the old life of 'recreations in the country side,' finding ample scope for his tastes at Limborne Castle; and some months after his sister's marriage, and when he had as he said 'taken the taste of Luccombe Terrace out of his mouth,' he announced his determination to proceed to New Zealand, and there 'make his fortune.' Nellie hated the

thought of losing her brother and only relative, but it was evident enough that Jack was not suited to any learned profession, he was too old for the Army, and the life he proposed for himself was after all the best suited to him. So a comfortable sum to start with was lodged in his name in one of the banks in the colony, and after a year spent in learning the ways of the place, and looking about him, on a large farm, Jack started, as he phrased it, 'on his own hook,' and succeeded so well, backed up as he was by certain remittances from home, that he bids fair to end as a colonial magnate of the first water.

The fair Theresa Denton received the news of Nellie's marriage with much equanimity; she had long before that event recovered from the shock to her sensibilities (never too highly strung) which Lord Limborne's conduct in the matter of the society paragraph gave her, and she and her sister

and Mrs. Denton were among the first to call and congratulate the 'happy couple' at Limborne Castle. Moreover, Theresa was quite aware of the fact that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and perhaps even better, and, still under the wing of the mighty society dame, Lady Leveret, she pursued the aims of her ambition, and succeeded before the season was over in landing a very big fish indeed. The languid Emily is torn between the claims of affection in the person of the well-born but poverty-stricken young doctor (upon whose advice she relies in her various migraines), and her ambition; but as she is not so fair to look upon as her large and lovely sister, and as suitable 'partis' do not press forward with the eagerness that might be expected, it is not at all unlikely that affection will gain the day, and render Emily the happiest of the Denton trio after all.

The forlorn Henry has found a vent for his sorrows through the medium of verse (?), and, occupied in publishing from time to time (strictly at his own expense) small volumes of sickly (and ungrammatical) sentimentalities, he is not oppressed, but, on the contrary, relieved at the open neglect of his aristocratic spouse. Miss Charlotte Ingle spends the most of her time between her sister and Mrs. Denton, to whom Charlotte has become a feminine fidus Achates, and her advice and assistance go far to make the grand entertainments (in which Mrs. Denton's soul delights) for which Wreford and No. 751, Piccadilly are celebrated, the successes they undoubtedly are.

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And so, having disposed of all our puppets, we make our bow, and wish our readers, farewell.

THE END.

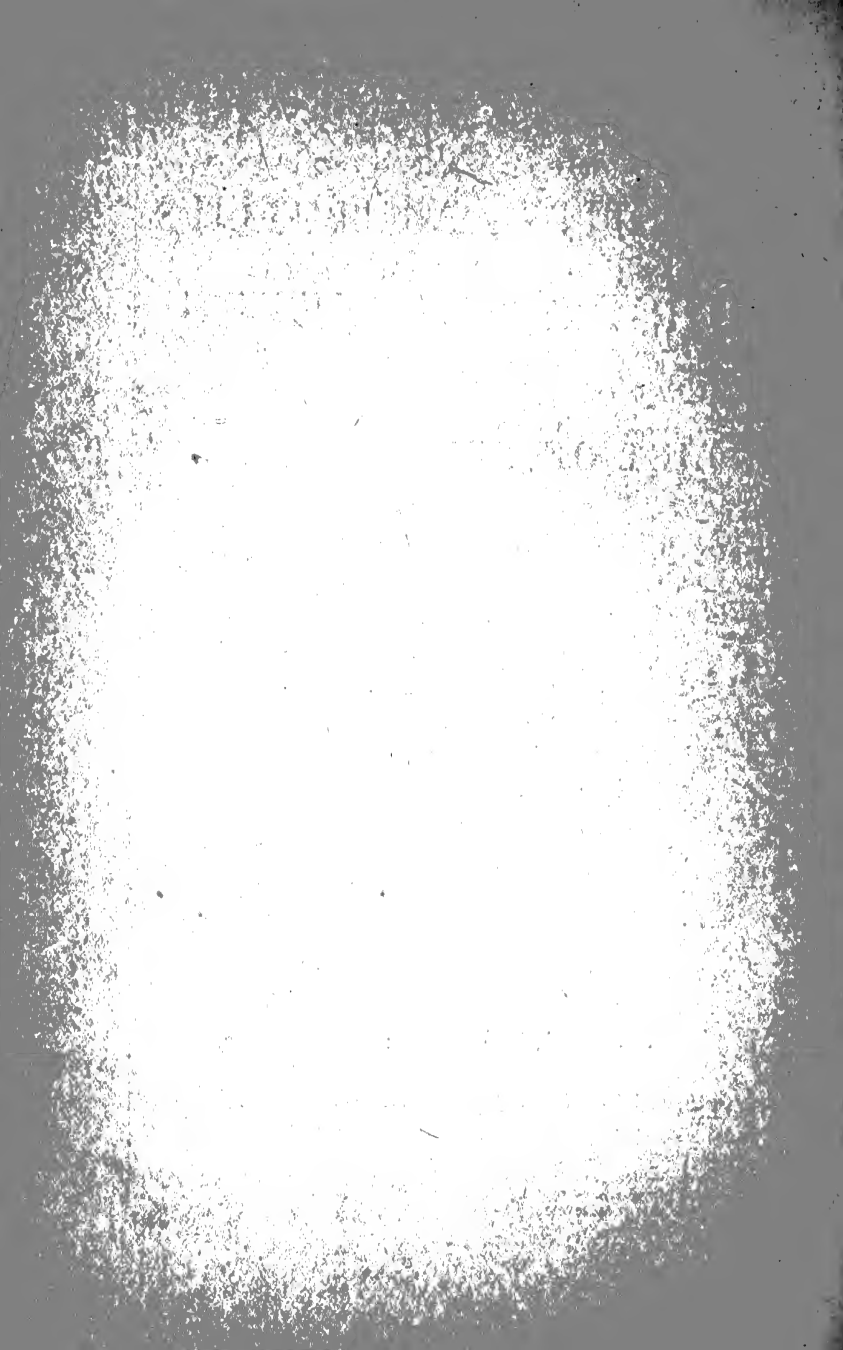
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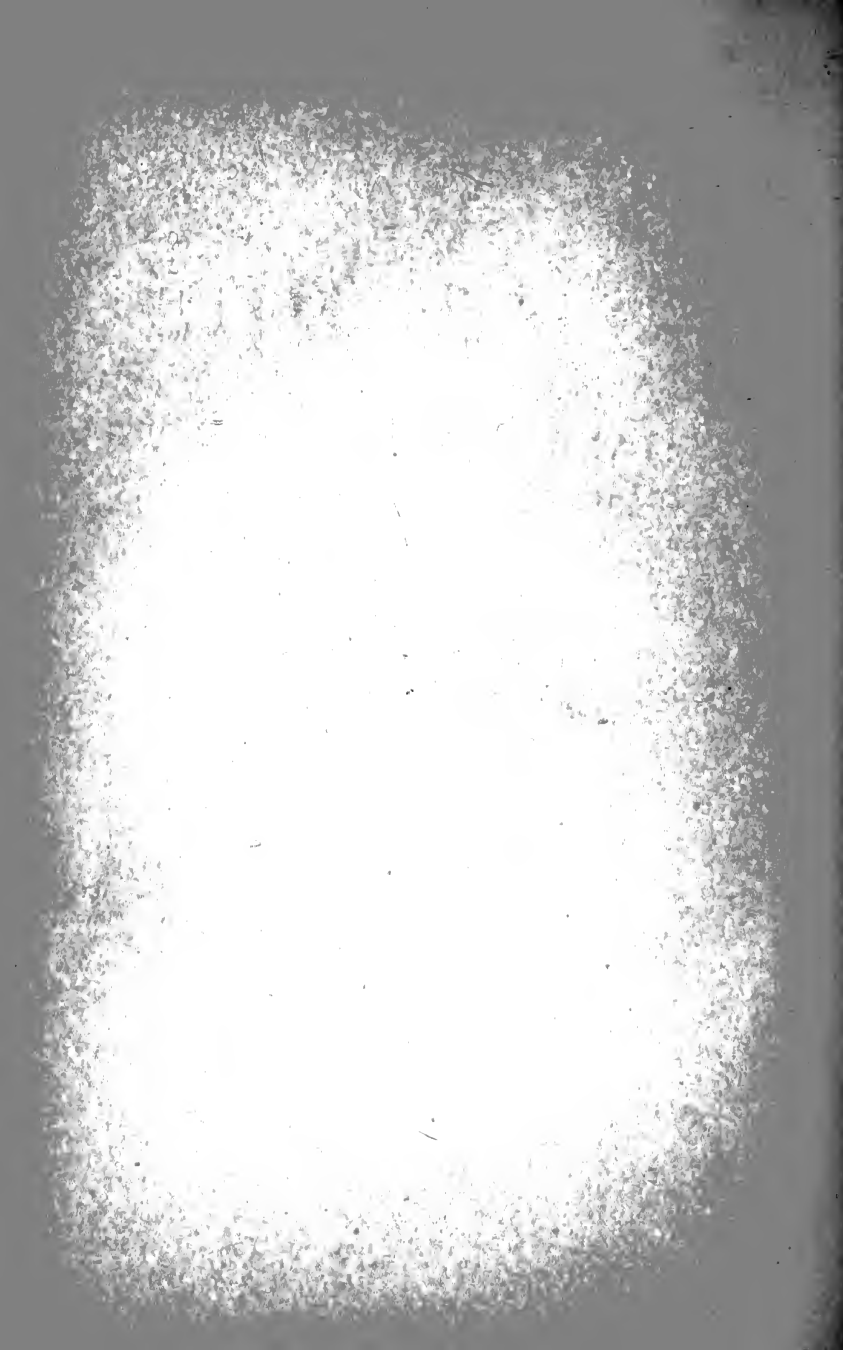
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